

Letter from Philip Adams to Selwyn Lloyd on Sudanese independence (Khartoum, 6 January 1956)


Caption: On 6 January 1956, Sir Philip George Doyne Adams, British Chargé d’Affaires in Khartoum, sends a letter to John Selwyn Brooke Lloyd, British Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, in which he describes the Sudanese independence ceremony. After the proclamation by the Sudanese Parliament of the country’s independence on 19 December 1955, official recognition was granted two weeks later.

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Despatch No. 5

(1015/56)

UNITED KINGDOM DIPLOMATIC MISSION,

KHARTOUM.

January 6, 1956.

J 51071/21

Sir,

I have the honour to report that specially appointed representatives of the Government of the United Kingdom and of the Government of the Republic of Egypt conveyed their recognition of the independence of the Sudan on the morning of Sunday, the first of January, 1956, and that, by this act, the Condominium of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan came formally to an end and the independent and sovereign Sudan was born. The British representative, Mr. A. D. Dodds-Parker, M.P., Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, had arrived in Khartoum on the previous day, and with the Egyptian representative, Lewa Abdel Fattah Hassan, was received by the Sudanese Prime Minister in his office in Parliament shortly before 8.0 a.m. In a brief and almost private ceremony the two representatives handed over to Sayed Ismail el-Azhari documents containing the formal recognition of their Governments and conveyed both official and personal congratulations and good wishes to the new state.

2. Mr. Dodds-Parker and his Egyptian colleague were then escorted to the Gallery of the House of Representatives which met at 8.0 a.m. The Prime Minister opened proceedings by reading the messages from Her Majesty's Government and from the Government of the Republic of Egypt, and added a few words of comment, the text of which forms the enclosure to this despatch. The five members who had been previously elected by Parliament to the Supreme Commission were next called in order that the Speaker should administer the oath to them on their assuming their high office.

3. Some surprise was caused when, escorted by the Sergeant at Arms in bright blue uniform which, but for its chain mail and gorgets, might have come straight from Leicester Square, only four of the five successors to the distinguished line of Governors-General appeared. Nothing daunted, the Speaker announced that he would proceed to administer the oath to those who were present, Sayeds Dardiri Mohammed Osman, Ahmed Mohammed Yasin, Abdel Fattah el-Maghraby and Ahmed Mohammed Salih; one member of the Commission, the Southerner Siricio Iro, had been prevented "for important reasons" from being present, and he would be sworn in if it later became possible to do so. All eyes were on the Commissioner of Police, sitting in the Gallery, since it was known that Siricio Iro was strongly suspected of having had treasonable connections with the mutineers of last August; but he subsequently denied responsibility for Siricio Iro's absence, and the missing Commissioner soon appeared without explanation and took the oath of office.

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The Right Honourable

J. Selwyn Lloyd, P.C., M.P.,
etc. etc. etc.,

Foreign Office.



4. In a short speech of considerable eloquence and dignity the Speaker, Sayed Babiker Awadalla, spoke to the House of the responsibilities as well as privileges which independence would bring and exhorted them to give unstinted and unselfish service to the new state.

5. The House then rose and, led by its officers and members of the Government, walked in solemn procession the half-mile or so through the streets of Khartoum to the Palace. Meanwhile a distinguished company, led by the two Sayeds themselves and by the special representatives of Her Majesty's Government and the Egyptian Government, and including members of the judiciary, foreign Liaison Officers and leaders of all sections of the community, had gathered on the spacious and shady lawns before the Palace. This building, dazingly white in the morning sunshine, which had been constructed on Kitchener's orders on the site of the place where Gordon gave his life and which had seen many another event in the history of this country, provided the background to the ceremonial which was to follow. When all had gathered and all five members of the Supreme Commission had taken their places, a short reading from the Koran was followed by a speech by the Prime Minister congratulating the people of the Sudan on the attainment of independence and acknowledging the part played by the Co-dominion in the execution of their obligations and in being ready to recognise the new status of the Sudan. He thanked all those who had contributed to the smooth working of the processes of self-determination and prayed to God to bless and guide the new Sudan; "our people were determined to achieve their independence, and indeed they did; they are now more determined to maintain it, and they will."

6. At 9.0 a.m. the Guard of Honour presented arms and the band struck up the General Salute as the Union Jack and the Egyptian flag, the official emblems of the Condominium for over half a century, were slowly hauled down from masts on the Palace roof, and the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, in unwonted harmony, together raised on a specially mounted flagstaff, the new tricolour flag of the Sudanese Republic. On the Palace roof also the new flag striped blue for the Nile, yellow for the desert and green for the agriculture of the Sudan, fluttered strongly in the keen North wind of the Khartoum winter: Anglo-Egyptian rule was seen to be ended and the new state to be born. A salute of 101 guns was fired and waves of cheering from all parts of the town could be heard as more and more new flags were hoisted. In the Palace garden not a few eyes were damp, and the thoughts of many ranged back over the years of the Condominium. For the British present the thoughts uppermost were those of pride of half-a-century's work in this unpromising country well done; for the Sudanese it must have been a moment of triumph but also of realisation of the magnitude of the tasks lying ahead.

7. As the Guard of Honour withdrew, the replicas of the British and Egyptian flags, mounted on lances and long used to indicate the physical presence of the Governor-General, now furled and covered, were presented by the Prime Minister to Mr. Dodds-Parker and to Lewa Abdel-Fattah Hassan; the Union Jack was borne away on behalf of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary by a Palace cavass with some 30 years service with British Governors-General and for whom, as no doubt for many other loyal and devoted employees, the occasion was almost too full of emotion.

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8. Despite the short time available to arrange suitable ceremonial and the appearance that everything had even then been left to the last moment, the Sudanese, who have remarkable talent for such things, arranged an impressive ceremony of great dignity. The rest of the day, which had been proclaimed a public holiday, was taken up with rejoicing and further festivities, and it is reported from the provinces that similar ceremonies were everywhere held without incident. The Supreme Commission met immediately and elected Sayed Abdel Fattah el-Maghrabi chairman for the first month of its existence.

9. Thus despite the almost indecent haste, begotten of political expediency, with which the last stages of self-determination were completed, the birth of the Sudanese State was accomplished with fitting dignity and ceremony. The fact that Her Majesty's Government had chosen to be represented by a Minister of the Crown drew favourable comments from all sides; and I would not wish to end this despatch without recording, with respect, my own appreciation of the readiness of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary to undertake the many duties he was called upon to perform and of the encouragement and help to my staff and myself which we received during his visit to Khartoum.

10. I am sending copies of this despatch to Her Majesty's Ambassadors in Cairo and Addis Ababa, to the Political Office with the Middle East Forces and to the Governors of Kenya and Uganda.

I have the honour to be with the highest respect,

Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

Philip Adams