



Photo: David Stewart-Smith ▶ p 89

*Sometimes, when somebody has power, the friendship has... one has to be a bit cautious. But I trust John Garang very much – and he trusts me also.*

Commemoration  
Miri  
April 2006



# Yousif Kuwa Mekki

February 12 and 13, 2001, London

*On 31 March 2001, Yousif Kuwa Mekki died in Norwich, England. Shortly before his death he agreed to a very long interview, that took two days to complete. In sessions of half an hour, with a weak voice but with unflinching mind, he spoke one more time about his life, the struggle for the rights of the Nuba people, and finally, his struggle against cancer.*

My name is **Yousif Kuwa Mekki**, I was born in Kusli, in the Miri Hills, in 1945.

**Father** My father had been a Non-Commissioned Officer during World War II. He fought in Ethiopia, in El Alamein and so on. After independence in 1956, the Government of Sudan needed soldiers to fight the rebellion in the South. Many Nuba men were tempted to rejoin the army by promises of good salaries and other rewards; my father too decided to go. Later I understood how he had been exploited. ▶ p 87

**Primary and intermediate school** I went to primary school in Miri; we sat for examination in 1957, but nobody passed because the teachers didn't teach us properly. The headmaster, who was supposed to give us mathematics, would just take his chair outside to go and sit under a tree by the time the pupils entered the class. He was from the North, and saw no need for a Nuba to be taught. I went to eastern Sudan with my father, and I repeated the year in Gibeet. I followed intermediate school in Kassala and in Sinkat. After that I went to Khartoum Commercial Secondary School.

**Secondary school** One day the religious teacher, who gave us Islam, asked the class: "What do you think about women's right to vote?" We all participated, some were for, some were against, and when we had finished debating, some students were asking him: "And you, teacher, what is your idea?" He said: "Why should women be given any rights? They don't even work in their home or in the kitchen: they have the Nuba boys for that." I was very frustrated; I just threw the books and went out of the class. After I passed the certificate I went to Darfur to work as a teacher.

**GUN** The General Union of the Nuba (GUN) was established after the October Revolution of 1964. GUN wanted the Nuba to elect their own people in the elections of 1965. Before, the Umma and the DUP (the dominating political parties at the time) would import their candidates to the Mountains from El Obeid and Khartoum; they would give people money or whatever, take their votes, and then never appear again. The Union wanted to put an end to this practice. As students in higher secondary school we participated in lectures, and in the University of Khartoum many of us were active in GUN. The Union gained eight seats at the cost of the Umma and the DUP. Philip Abbas Gabboush was the head of GUN. I looked at him as a godfather; he did a lot of good for the Nuba and he taught me politics by practice.

**University** In 1975 I passed the examination to enter Khartoum University. Studying politics and anthropology at the Faculty of Economics really opened my eyes. One day I came across a book written by Nyerere, it was called something like 'we must run while others walk' (*Julius Nyerere was Tanzania's first president*). To me the most important issue he addressed was his belief in the indigenous religion. As a Muslim I was uncomfortable with the Nuba traditions – the *kujurs* (healers or witch doctors) and so on – but Nyerere's writings gave me the feeling that all religion is one; the only thing is faith. And of course we started to believe in African Socialism at that time (based on the idea of the traditional African community providing for all its members).