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OBITUARY

Mohamed Omer Beshir died in Khartoum on 29 January 1992. Universally known to his English-speaking friends simply as M.O.B., he created an unforgettable impression on those who met him. Passionate and eloquent, he was never happier than when discussing topics close to his heart—in particular the nurturing of a Sudanese national consciousness and the protection of human rights.

He was born in Karima in the northern Sudan in 1926 and gained his higher education first at University College (formerly Gordon College) Khartoum and later at Queen's University, Belfast, where he earned a BSc in Economics in 1956 and finally Linacre College, Oxford. His professional career spanned secondary school teaching, university administration and diplomacy before he became a professorial fellow at the University of Khartoum's Institute of Asian and African Studies in 1974. The following year he became Dean of that university's Graduate College and for ten years was very active in organizing conferences and promoting the publication of Khartoum PhD theses in the humanities and social sciences. In the mid-1980s he embarked upon a project that in many ways was the fulfillment of his lifelong interest in education. After much lobbying and fund-raising, he was able to open the doors of the first private university in the Sudan—the Ahlia University, Omdurman, which emphasized vocation education with departments such as Computer Science and Business Management. He made a special effort to encourage and find scholarships for Southern Sudanese students.

M.O.B. was a prolific writer. His concern with education is reflected in one of his earliest published works, *Educational Development in the Sudan, 1898-1956* (Oxford, 1969) and in later monographs published in Khartoum, *Education in Africa* (1974) and *Educational Policy and the Employment Problem in the Sudan* (1974 and 1977). His great concern for forging a truly Sudanese identity which would embrace both northern and southern Sudanese was the driving

force behind a series of books about the south, *The Southern Sudan: Background to Conflict* (1968), *The Southern Sudan: From Conflict to Peace* (1975), *Diversity, Regionalism and National Unity* (Uppsala, 1979), and *Southern Sudan: Regionalism and Religion* (1984). Some of his reflections on the concept of a Sudanese identity will appear shortly in a book of conference proceedings, *Religion and National Identity in Africa* (Northwestern University Press, 1992). His contributions to the study of broader questions in African politics are to be found in *The Mercenaries in Africa* (1972), *Israel and Africa* (1974), and *Terramedia: Themes in Afro-Arab Relations* (1982).

Although M.O.B.'s writings are a monument to his broad-ranging mind and liberal humanism, he was no mere armchair scholar. He was active behind the scenes in promoting dialog between northern and southern Sudan in the 1960s (particularly at the roundtable conference of 1965) and early 1970s (crowned by the Addis Ababa Accords of 1972) and in bringing about the first major international conference on Arab-African relations in Abu Dhabi in 1976. He was a tireless champion of human rights in the Sudan and was one of the founders of the Sudan Human Rights Organization.

We shall miss the warmth of his friendship and the inspiration of his commitment to a liberating vision of the Sudan and of African-Arab relations.

John Hunwick
R.S. O'Fahey