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Meeting Summary

Southern Sudan: Approaching the Referendum

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HE Dr Luka Tombekana Monoja:

There are so many referenda in Sudan, but today I will speak on Southern Sudan, including Abyei. There are major issues which have not yet been concluded.

One step was completed yesterday with the registration of voters for the referendum in Southern Sudan. The referendum is the last most important action of the CPA signed between the government of Sudan under the leadership of the NCP and the SPLM/A after twenty-one years of war. When the agreement was concluded and publicly signed in 2005, many in Southern Sudan were upbeat and happy because when President Bashir spoke there he said that from then, January 9 would be the true independence day of Sudan, not January 1. That remark showed that the CPA was a document which informed all Sudanese. Occasionally during the seventeen months of negotiation, political leaders in Sudan would cross the border to consult with John Garang, meaning that the ground was ripe for Garang to turn a new page. This meant that the CPA was signed under a unity arrangement. Mediators were practical, as the Southerners wanted a two year transition period and the Northerners wanted a ten year transition period, they added these together and divided by two, so the six year transition made everyone happy.

After the CPA, the formation of government structures was easily done, and it was the most important step after July 2005. An administration was set up and it was accepted.

The North/South border should have been decided in the pre-mediation period, and there are three other elements which are important tests for the political leaders:

- The Joint Integrated Unit (JIU) is supposed to be a contingent of soldiers which is 50 percent composed of the SPLA and 50 percent of the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF). It was intended to create a national army, and to develop a common military doctrine.
- The phenomenon of wealth-sharing: One Sudanese leader said that because it was supposed to be a sharing agreement, the North and the South should share Sudanese wealth 50/50. But because the areas most affected by the war are in the South, it would effectively mean the North and South sharing the wealth of

the South. It is often thought that the North has no oil but this is a misconception. It goes without saying that some of the biggest sources of revenue in Sudan were held under the monopoly of Khartoum. Leaders in the South accepted this because they thought that the national government would be involved in the reconstruction of war-destroyed areas, including in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile states.

- Democratic transformation: This was one of the slogans of the alliance. The National Congress elections did not progress as expected. It is not possible in a partnership to promote democratic promotion.

An obviously important factor is the holding of the referendum in Southern Sudan. It took more than two years for the Referendum Bill to be signed into law and six months to form a Referendum Commission. There has been enthusiasm in Southern Sudan, and people are willing to suspend some activities so that the activities of the registration officers can be funded. The people of Southern Sudan are willing to endure any process to carry them forward to January 9.

Recent statements by President Bashir are disturbing. We have to get to the polls and the people of Southern Sudan must be free to express their will. The referendum has been due since 1953, partly because attitudes to Sudan changed after the Egyptian Revolution in 1952. There are a number of political leaders expressing alternative views, but President Bashir is saying that they will only express a unity vote. Salva Kiir has said that he will accept a fair and just result, and that everyone giving their opinion will be able to speak freely and unchallenged.

There has been harassment of Southerners in Khartoum since the beginning of registration, and some people have had their voting cards bought from them. Sixty percent of those registered must cast their votes for the results to be valid, but voting cards have been bought from young people for 500 Sudanese pounds. This should not be allowed to diminish or discourage peace in Sudan.

The CPA is the beginning of peace, and it will always be the basis for Sudanese people living together. We have seen much war, and we vow not to see it again. What is in the referendum constitutes a framework for people to live together peacefully. Since signing the agreement, people have been much more free and unmolested, but this has not been the case universally.

As Sudan approaches the referendum there are stumbling blocks and we hope that international community will support us and believe in the rights of the African community and every entity which sees itself as one people. The South and the North have been more friendly in the last six years than in the fifty-three years of independence. I genuinely believe that if the Southern Sudanese people voted for unity the result would be accepted by political leaders in Southern Sudan. We are democratically-minded.

Q&A SESSION

Q: Please can you comment on Salva's refusal to meet the request of the Referendum Commission for a delay to the referendum?

Q: Please can you comment on rumours that the Khartoum government is encouraging Southerners to bring cases to court saying that the referendum is unconstitutional in order to get it postponed?

A (Dr Luka Tombekana Monoja): President Kiir sees no reason for the referendum to be postponed. It is surprising to say that the referendum is not constitutional because we signed it together in Naivasha and because it is incorporated into the Southern Sudan Referendum Act of March 2009. There is no valid reason for postponement. Both leaders in Sudan would understand if we were to say no to a strategic reason for postponement.

Q: There have been negative remarks about the referendum from President Omar al Bashir. Do you think that this is part of a wider political strategy and what is the nature of this strategy, particularly in light of the indictment hanging over him?

A: President Bashir's political strategy is for him to comment on.

Q: What about the role of the guarantors of the CPA? There have been slippages in the implementation of the border-line. Has the role of international guarantors been as robust as you thought?

A: The guarantors have supported both partners strongly, positively and persistently. Any shortcomings have been down to the Sudanese. Six years is enough time – it is the longest period of peace in Sudanese history. The guarantors have tried their best and are still trying. The UN, AU, IGAD and other international partners are trying to make the Sudanese make their country good. They are doing excellent work but it is up to the Sudanese.

Q: What are the chances that things will go smoothly after the referendum? Is there a possibility Southern Sudan will start to be a problem? The chance is low but it is not non-existent. There is one-party rule in Sudan, and a lot of things go on that we do not know about.

A: The SPLM is the main party in GoSS, but it is not the only party. There were six parties in the Executive before the elections, now there are four. There are two political parties with seats in Parliament, and there is a Leader of the Opposition. You should look at these facts. I am proud that in the short period that we have been in power, we have not promoted a one-party government.

People are apprehensive that Southern Sudan will not be stable if it becomes independent but it has been stable for the last six years.

Traditional cattle rustling is a potential source of instability. It has always been apparent and everyone has failed to stop it. It is worse now because it is done with AK47s. A good way to achieve reconciliation is to progress wealth. Some of Southern Sudan's provinces and some tribes have always experienced manipulation by older political parties in the North. They are not succeeding in generating political conflict. The South started with nothing, and succeeded in creating a structure of government, but it is not yet as efficient as we want it to be.

Q: What health challenges will Southern Sudan face if independence is gained?

A: Southern Sudan's health challenges will be there whether the region becomes independent or not. There is a shortage of human resources, of infrastructure and of funding for health. Maternal mortality is well above 2000 per 100,000. Afghanistan was once as high, but Sudan is now alone in this. It is the Ministry of Health's mission to mobilise technical assistance for support in meeting the health needs of the Sudanese.

Funding is a severe problem for the government. There are a lot of development partners including UNICEF, DFID, USAID and the Joint Donor Team of 6 European countries. There is also support from bilateral organisations in training community workers. The health situation in Southern Sudan will improve before I leave the department.

Q: What is the status of the Abyei referendum?

A: The Abyei referendum has no Commission. People are still talking about how and when to form one. People continue to quarrel as they have done for fifty years. Now the obvious position of the government is not necessarily the position of the Misseriya of Southern Kordofan.

Q: If there is a vote for independence, would GoSS face the challenge of great expectations? Will the people want too much too quickly?

A: The people of Southern Sudan are rational. They understand that miracles rarely happen in a socio-economic sense, but they do in religion. There is speculation that the people are expecting too much from the GOSS. In the first three or four years, the first three-quarters of our government's revenue was spent on salaries, with a substantial amount going to armed groups. When the reprised agreement was signed, any military group member had to

choose to join the SPLA or the SAF. All of them decided to join the SPLA because of pressure from Sudan. We had to pay them, and this became part of the transition. Demobilisation started a year ago, and since then we have progressively downsized.

Food security, education and health are the main priorities of GoSS. For 54 years of Sudanese independence, not a kilometre of paved road was built in the South. Now there are over forty kilometres in the town of Juba.

Q: What does GoSS want from the international community that is not being delivered?

A: GoSS is not asking for anything which has not been delivered. NGOs working in the South have their own projects. For example, they may feel that they must train community health workers, but those trained do not fall into the right profile so the Ministry of Health and the local council will not pay them. We say please join us, but regrettably as training takes eighteen months to three years, it is too long a project for an NGO.

Most NGOs are still relief-minded, but this is not a priority when we are developing a national constitution plan. If a group is operating in an activity which is not part of that programme then it is not with us. We appreciate people working with us rather than on our behalf.

Q: Please can you tell us more about education as a priority?

A: Education is an instrument for anyone in the process of skills acquisition. In five years, school enrolment has gone up from 300,000 to 3 million. Sadly though, the quality is very poor. The South is English-speaking but half of children are in Arabic education. Neither language is acquired to a high enough standard especially if compared to our neighbours in Uganda, where by Grade 6 children can speak English well.

In Arabic, children in Southern Sudan can hardly write a letter. This is because teachers are not trained; they become teachers because there is nothing else to do. Trained teachers have left the profession, and it is better for them to become a Minister, for example, it gives them a better life.

There is no teacher training college. One opened two years ago, but after the first class graduated standards fell in the second year. Teachers are educated in Arabic rather than in English, and are trained in the latter for three months so their standard is not good.

Q: Juba is a fast-growing city, but will independence create the same situation as in the North of a centralisation of power in the capital city?

A: Our slogan is decentralised government. We have an operational local government which is entrenched in the constitution.

On the issue of financial dependence, in the last few months the Ministry of Finance has initiated a process for a functional tax system. Tax is being collected but it is not in the Treasury. There needs to be promotion of investment, and investors are not likely to come to Sudan until after the referendum. The Bank only gives lines of credit to investors in Northern Sudan, and so we are waiting until the position of Southern Sudan becomes clear.

Over six years, the non-Islamic banks of Southern Sudan cannot function because all withdrawals of foreign currency are controlled by the North. If GoSS needs money in US dollars it must first buy money in Sudanese pounds – even though we are part of the same country. We are not getting 50 percent of oil revenue, it is in fact closer to 26 percent. We have no access to production sites and we cannot continue past January 9.

Q: What are your arrangements for dealing with the relationship with Northern Sudan?

A: GoSS feels that the North will be Southern Sudan's closest and most friendly neighbour. We have almost no tribes across the border but there are long relations, and there are many Northern Sudanese who made their fortunes in the South. Some will vote for separation but will stay in Khartoum. We do not necessarily see an adverse situation as portrayed by the international media. There needs to be a reason for violence. We share a common language and we now want to be horse riders, not just those being led.