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SUDAN Abyei community leader requests urgent international intervention

A senior member of the Ngok Dinka community in the UK is calling for urgent international intervention in the oil-rich Abyei area following revelations that northern Arab Misseriya chiefs have established an alternative government for the region, in clear violation of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between North and South Sudan.

The alternative regime, which is due to become operational on December 25, includes a governor, deputy governor, legislative council, mayor, defense council and head of security. Speaking to Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), Dr. Zachariah Bol Deng, a former politician and prominent Abyei elder, described this development as a “coup” and commented that “this amounts to a declaration of war against Abyei.”

The oil-rich region is increasingly being viewed as the flashpoint for renewed war between northern and southern Sudan, with tensions rising in the run-up to the area’s critical referendum on self-determination, which is scheduled for January 9, 2011.

The plebiscite to determine whether Abyei remains part of the northern state of South Kordofan, or is returned to Warrap in Greater Bahr el Ghazal, is to take place in tandem with South Sudan’s referendum on self-determination. The Abyei plebiscite is a key part of the CPA, which brought an end to the civil war that had ravaged the country since 1983. However, while preparations for the southern referendum are progressing, disagreements over voter eligibility have stalled the Abyei referendum process.

Dr. Bol Deng warned, “If war breaks out it will be genocide, and it is likely even to derail the southern referendum.” He stressed that the situation in Abyei “could make or break the peace and stability of the whole country.”

CSW-UK’s Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, “It is vital that the Abyei Referendum Commission is formed as soon as possible, and that in accordance with the Abyei Protocol and international arbitration, voting rights are limited to the Ngok Dinka and permanent residents. Failure to implement this key component of the CPA puts the entire process at risk and could contribute to a renewed outbreak of war. The northern Sudanese government must also make every effort to ensure that the Misseriya disbands its parallel administration in order to avert the potential return of civil conflict.”

Notes to Editors:

1. The ruling National Congress Party insists that the nomadic Misseriya tribe, who have access to certain pasture-lands for part of each year, be accorded full voting rights; whereas the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) insist that, in accordance with the Abyei Protocol and a subsequent ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration, only the Ngok Dinka tribe and permanent residents may vote.
2. Tensions are also rising along western sections of the North-South border, where three southern areas have recently been bombed, ostensibly by the Sudanese Armed Forces, though the Sudanese army has fiercely denied involvement in the latter two attacks.

3. Another threat to the referendum is a lawsuit that northern proxies are currently preparing to bring against the South Sudan Referendum Commission to annul the entire referendum process due to alleged constitutional violations.