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SUDAN CSW welcomes Abyei withdrawal, calls for referendum

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) welcomes confirmation by the UN yesterday of the withdrawal of Sudanese troops from Abyei, and calls on the international community to facilitate a referendum on the future of the region, as stipulated by the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA).

In the interests of a viable and sustained peace, CSW also calls on the international community to ensure an end to fighting along the north-south border and immediate humanitarian access to the Nuba Mountains, where the population faces imminent starvation.

In May 2011, the Sudanese army occupied Abyei following a three-day clash with South Sudanese troops, destroying a referendum on its future, which should have taken place in tandem with the vote on independence for South Sudan, but had been postponed following disagreements over voter eligibility.

Sudan had argued that the Miseriya, a nomadic northern tribe that roam into Abyei in order to feed and water their livestock, should be included in the referendum, while South Sudan maintained that only the Ngok Dinka people who reside in Abyei should participate.

Commenting on the issue, an Abyei Elder told CSW, "We would like to have a referendum and anyone who has actually been resident in Abyei is welcome to participate. The Ngok Dinka have been peaceful [sic] with the Miseriya tribes and will continue to welcome them to graze and take water, but they have their own residences and should not be included in the referendum."

Following the incursion into Abyei by the Sudanese army, at least 130,000 Ngok Dinka residents were displaced and access for humanitarian organizations to the area was restricted.

While South Sudan eventually withdrew its troops from Abyei, in line with a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) demand for both sides to demilitarize the area by May 16, Sudan maintained its armed presence in violation of several agreements, including UNSC Resolution 2046. Although a UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) was created to oversee demilitarization by the two sides, Khartoum refused to negotiate a Status of Forces Agreement with UNISFA while also ensuring it lacked a human rights mandate.

CSW's Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, "CSW welcomes Sudan's withdrawal from Abyei, which is long overdue, and continues to call for a referendum on self determination, as stipulated by the CPA. Although troop withdrawal and the resumption of peace talks in Addis Ababa are being hailed as a breakthrough, this must not be allowed to obscure the Sudanese government's responsibility for the creation of humanitarian crises not only in Abyei, but also in Darfur and most recently, in the Nuba Mountains, where access is being denied to a civilian population that is deliberately targeted by the military and faces imminent starvation. Also concerning are the clashes that continue to occur intermittently along the unresolved north-south border. The international community is currently investing vast resources into securing peace in the area. However, until there is more a comprehensive approach to these problems, a sustainable peace will continue to remain elusive. In order to ensure a viable and sustainable peace, from this point onwards the Sudanese government must be held to account for all violations of its international obligations, regardless of where they occur.

Notes to Editors:

1. Please include the following linked text in any online articles using the above information... Find out more about [religious freedom in Sudan](#) from Christian Solidarity Worldwide.