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## **SUDAN | Another Year Passes With No Referendum for Abyei**

The second anniversary of the delayed referendum on the future of Abyei, the oil-rich region that is an ongoing source of dispute between Sudan and South Sudan, was Jan. 1.

According to the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which ended Sudan's decades-long civil war, a referendum on self determination to allow the people of Abyei to determine whether they would stay part of Sudan or join South Sudan was meant to have occurred in tandem with South Sudan's own plebiscite on independence, which took place on January 9, 2011. It was postponed due to ongoing disagreements between Khartoum and South Sudan over voter eligibility.

The nomadic Arab Misseriya tribe, which has access to certain pasture-lands in Abyei for part of each year, wish to be accorded full voting rights in the referendum. According to the Abyei Protocol and a subsequent ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration, only the Ngok Dinka tribe and permanent residents may vote.

The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) overran Abyei Town in May 2011, displacing over 20,000 people. In August 2012, both the SAF and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) fully withdrew from the area, allowing Abyei residents to return and begin rebuilding their lives.

During talks mediated by the African Union on January 5, 2013, President Omar Al-Bashir of Sudan and President Salva Kiriir of South Sudan agreed to the establishment of the Abyei Administration Area, the Abyei Area Council and the Abyei Area Police Service, which are keys to the implementation of the referendum ahead of the AU's proposed date of October 2013. Although no agreement has been reached on voter eligibility, earlier this week Misseriya leaders issued a statement announcing their intention to move into Abyei for the duration of 2013 in order to participate in the referendum. An Abyei elder who spoke to Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) insisted that only people who reside permanently in the Abyei Area and the Ngok Dinka people should be allowed to vote.

CSW's Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, "We are saddened to note that yet another year has passed and the people of Abyei have not been allowed to exercise their right to self-determination. The ongoing uncertainty and insecurity will only be resolved when a properly instituted referendum takes place. It is vital that the date for this long overdue referendum is not postponed again. The statement issued by Misseriya leaders is both unhelpful and worrying. Nevertheless, voting must be restricted to the legitimate inhabitants of Abyei, namely the Ngok

Dinka and other permanent residents of the area, and all forces seeking to undermine results by intimidation or by altering local demography must be countered swiftly.”