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SUDAN | Paramount Chief of Ngok Dinka Buried in Abyei

Chief Kuol Deng Kuol, Paramount Chief of nine Ngok Dinka peoples in Abyei, Sudan, was buried on May 6. He died on May 4 when his convoy was ambushed by members of the Arab Misseriya after attending peace talks.

Chief Kuol Deng Kuol had participated in a meeting with the Sudanese delegation of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee (AJOC) and proceeded to Kej, also known as Difra, in a convoy of the United Nations Interim Force for Abyei (UNISAF). The convoy was intercepted by Misseriya tribesmen, and after a few hours of negotiation, the Misseriya opened fire, killing Chief Kuol Deng Kuol, and at least three others.

Speaking to Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), an Abyei elder expressed his shock at the death of the Paramount Chief, who was well respected both in South Sudan and Sudan. He stated that the Chief's death is a sign that even those who are attempting to work for peace in Abyei are being silenced and that the people of Abyei must be allowed to participate in a referendum and decide their future, since the current stalemate is far too costly.

The killings have been condemned by the UN Secretary General, the African Union and the U.S. government.

The future of the disputed oil-rich border region remains a source of conflict between Sudan and South Sudan. According to the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which ended Sudan's decades-long civil war, a referendum allowing 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 Jan. 9, 2011. It was postponed due to ongoing disagreements between Khartoum and South Sudan over voter eligibility.

The nomadic Misseriya tribe, which has access to certain pasture-lands in Abyei for part of each year, insists on being 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

and permanent residents may vote. Tensions increased in January following a statement by the Misseriya that they intended to remain in Abyei during 2013 in order to participate in the referendum, which is currently scheduled for October 2013.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We extend our sincere condolences to the family of Chief Kuol Deng (Majok) Kuol, and to the Ngok Dinka people. His untimely death is an indication of the dangers posed by the current stalemate and reaffirms the urgent need for a referendum conducted in line with the international ruling that will allow the people of Abyei to determine their future. CSW calls upon the international community to ensure that all agreements signed by Sudan and South Sudan with regard to Abyei are adhered to, and that any attempt to undermine them using violence and intimidation, or by altering the local demography, is dealt with swiftly and decisively."