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Referendum Watch

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Highlights

SSRC says it would be "miracle" to conduct referendum as scheduled

Xinhua 27/10/10 - Chairman of South Sudan Referendum Commission Mohamed Ibrahim Khalil said Wednesday the referendum process was facing increasing obstacles and that conducting it within the short remaining time would be completely a "miracle."

"It is unlikely to tell the Sudanese people that the process is easy," Khalil told reporters after meeting with Sudanese First Vice-President and President of south Sudan government Salva Kiir Mayardit in Khartoum on Wednesday.

"The time is very short. It will be a complete miracle to conduct the referendum in the short remaining period. However, I still believe that the miracle can happen," he added.

In the meantime, Khalil acknowledged that the referendum timetable was a violation of the Referendum Act which stipulates that the voters' lists must be completed three months before the voting begins.

"There will be only five days since the publication of the final voters' list and the beginning of the vote. This is a violation of the Act," he noted.

However, he added that the referendum commission has submitted a memorandum to the Sudanese Presidency complaining over the shortness of the remaining time before the referendum, saying that "we will wait for what the Presidency will decide."

NCP rejects proposal to annex Abyei to the South

Al-Rai Al-Aam 28/10/10 – the NCP has rejected call for a deal over Abyei territory. NCP leading figure, Al-Dirdiri Mohamed Ahmed, reacting to SPLM Secretary-General Pagan Amum's call for a deal, said "we oppose land for peace deal proposed by Amum". "The NCP is striving to resolve Abyei issue based on constitutional principles contained in the CPA away from deals".

"Abyei is not a piece of chocolate or bread to be given up. It is a land and people who are part of greater Sudan," NCP Political Mobilization Secretary, Haj Magid Siwar, said, according to *Akhir Lahza* 28/ 10/10.

Al-Watan 28/10/10 reports that the Misseriya have also rejected the SPLM proposal describing it as "disturbing and unacceptable" and wondered what motives behind such a proposal could be. Musa Hamdein, the Secretary-General of the Misseriya general Association, said that Abyei would never be subject to any political deal and that the Misseriya would not give up their traditional rights to the area.

Meanwhile, *Sudan Tribune website* 27/10/10 reported that South Sudan's ruling party have issued conflicting statements on whether it wants the region of Abyei to be annexed to the south through a political settlement and Presidential decree if a referendum on the region's future does

not go ahead in January as scheduled.

SPLM Secretary-General Pagan Amum said Tuesday that the issue was being held to “hostage” by Sudan’s ruling party but that they were willing to pay a “ransom” for the region to be returned to south Sudan.

This appeared to be the parties new position after a senior minister in the coalition government told Reuters on Wednesday that the US proposal had been “agreed” by the SPLM in an attempt to stop the dispute over the region trigger a return to war.

However on Wednesday evening, SPLM Secretary for Information and Communications in the Southern Sector, Bol Makueng went on southern television to say that Amum had been misquoted.

He said Pagan Amum did not say anything about the Presidency settling Abyei’s future through a deal or would be handled by Sudan’s tripartite Presidency, which includes the President of Southern Sudan, Salva Kiir Mayardit, as 1st Vice President.

“Pagan did not say Abyei will be handled by the Presidency. He was misquoted. He said the referendum date for Abyei is the same as the referendum date for Southern Sudan referendum,” said Makueng.

On Wednesday Reuter’s interviewed with Luka Biong, a senior SPLM member of Sudan’s coalition government in Khartoum, appeared to corroborate and elaborate on Amum’s statement.

Biong who is the Government of National Unity’s cabinet affairs minister told Reuters “The south had accepted a U.S. suggestion that it annex Abyei by presidential decree if the referendum did not go ahead.

To compensate the north for agreeing to a peaceful settlement along these lines, the south would agree to arrange a financial package.

He said this could be in the form of an interest-free loan to the north to cover up to half the loss in oil revenues if the south secedes...

Mbeki affirms NCP, SPLM ability to resolve referendum issues

Xinhua 27/10/10 - Chairman of African Union High Panel on Sudan, Thabo Mbeki on Wednesday affirmed the ability of Sudan's government partners to resolve difference over Abyei and south Sudan referendum arrangements.

"We are quite confident that indeed solutions will be found for outstanding issues," Mbeki told reporters following his meeting with Sudanese First Vice-President and President of south Sudan government Salva Kiir Mayardit in Khartoum Wednesday.

"Discussions are continuing and serious efforts are being made by the NCP and the SPLM to find a solution for the issue of Abyei, as it is an important part in the process of the CPA implementation," he said.

"When the two sides reach a solution, then we can go back to the meeting that was originally planned to take place in Addis Ababa in order to sign an agreement that will cover all matters that are outstanding, including the issue of Abyei," added Mbeki.

Mbeki is leading the African Union mediation between the NCP and the SPLM, the major parties to the CPA, inked in 2005, which ended around two-decade civil war between north and south Sudan.

The NCP-SPLM meeting, which was supposed to convene in Addis Ababa on Wednesday, has been postponed due to the two parties' differences.

Interview: former US special envoy says Turabi's loyalists seeking to undermine referendum

Sudan Tribune website 27/10/10 - The former US special envoy to Sudan on Tuesday said that elements within the government loyal to the Islamist opposition leader Hassan Al-Turabi are seeking to derail the January 2011 referendum in order to avert what appears to be the likely separation of the South.

Andrew Natsios who just returned from a trip that took him to South Sudan said that while president Omer Al-Bashir and his 2nd Vice president Ali Osman Taha are "moderates", he pointed fingers at pro-Turabi figures within the regime who do not want the South to separate.

"If the Sudanese government stops stonewalling They [National Congress Party] are trying to use the referendum as a weapon. The north wants to get a higher use of oil, they want a deal on Nile River and debt level," Natsios said.

Natsios dismissed criticisms that the tight timeline will undermine the credibility of the plebiscite.

"I don't think the issue of transparency is related to timing. It is really about the logistics and putting everything in place for the vote to take place. Most of the work on the actual logistics is carried out by the UN and other NGO's," he said.

He also warned that any move to delay the vote by more than two weeks "could bring violence" to the region. Furthermore, he said that the Obama administration should be prepared to use its air force should the North attempt to invade the South or take over the oilfields.

"They are losing control of Darfur and South; people in the East from the Beja [tribe] are getting very upset.... They cancelled some very important agricultural and irrigation projects in Gezira [state]" he said.

Natsios noted controversial statements made by the former finance minister Abdel-Rahim Hamdi five years ago in which he called on the NCP to undertake massive development projects within a very limited area of the North in order to build a reliable electoral base while ignoring other parts of the country.

He also suggested that the NCP has little confidence in the loyalty of the army particularly after the attack by the Darfuri Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) on the capital in May 2008 for

their belief that it is heavily infiltrated by supporters of Turabi who now heads the Popular Congress Party (PCP).

"They [the army] did not intervene [to stop the JEM attack] which I find stunning considering how close they got to overthrowing the government. Fifty percent of the army leadership was handpicked by Turabi," Natsios said. He further added that intelligence bureaus in the region believe Turabi will make another attempt to overthrow the government.

Turabi, who was close to Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir before a bitter power struggle and split in 1999-2000, has been accused by Khartoum of being behind JEM which has waged war against the central government since 2003 in Darfur.

"The question we need to ask ourselves is how much stress is they [the NCP] under; they are standing with their back against the wall. They are getting so weak now they can't enforce an agreement," he said.

The former envoy referred to the stalemate over Abyei stressing that the NCP has lost control over the issue to the Arab Misseriya tribe who live in the area.

"80%-90% is what I am told is demarcated [in North-South Sudan borders]. The real issue is that of Abyei. I don't think they [the NCP] have the political power over the Misseriya anymore....the north is too weak" he said, adding that compromises offered by the SPLM to break the deadlock were rejected for that particular reason.

The Misseriya tribesmen fought with the north during the two-decade civil war against southern rebels that ended in 2005. Natsios said he finds it "interesting" that the Misseriya are now formally incorporated in the Sudanese army.

Nonetheless, Natsios emphasized that both the leaders of the North and South know that "they have a lot to lose" if they go to war "no matter how much they despise each other".

"They [North and South] know if they fail [to avert a war] the oil flow will stop. They are dependent on each other. They have built huge public sectors with thousands on their payroll," he said, adding that he was impressed with the development that took place in Juba.

Natsios said he is "cautiously optimistic" over the future of the country after the referendum and revealed that he finished working on a series of books titled "what everyone needs to know about Sudan and Darfur" that will be published by Oxford University Press and will be out early in 2011.

We will spare no effort to preserve unity – NCP Nafie

Al-Rai Al-Aam Khartoum, 28/10/10 – Nafie Ali Nafie, a senior aide to President Al-Bashir, said the Sudanese government would spare no efforts to dislodge all obstacles to preserving the country's unity even if that requires "some form of roughing up". Addressing a symposium in Khartoum yesterday on "Women, Peace and Unity", Nafie called upon advocates for separation to review their positions, advising them not to base their support for separation on partisan or individual differences.

Al-Bashir's aide also pointed out that the key reason they allowed the CPA provisions on self-determination for southern Sudanese was because they believed that, given absolute freedom of choice, southern Sudanese would vote for unity.

Akhir Lahza 28/10/10 reports Nafie broke in tears as he was reportedly so touched by the remarks of SPLM's representative Ms Ikhfaz Wida'a who spoke about unity and the need to consolidate efforts to preserve it.

SPLM decides to dissolve National Liberation Council

Akhir Lahza 28/10/10 – The SPLM has decided to dissolve the National Liberation Council (its parliament), demobilize its members and replace it with a 100-member revolutionary council which will meet after the conduct of the referendum on south Sudan's self-determination.

Sources said the membership of the new revolutionary council includes four northern members only: Dr. Mansour Khaled, Yassir Arman, Malik Aqar and Abdul Aziz Al-Hilu. According to the sources, SPLM's doubt about allegiance of the members of the Liberation Council was the reasons for the decision to dissolve it. The decision was endorsed by the recent meeting of the SPLM Political Bureau.

Israeli envoy in Juba for coordination on referendum

Al-Intibaha 28/10/10 – The south-south consultative council held talks yesterday with US Charge d'Affaires in Juba, who was accompanied by a special Israeli envoy, for preparation and coordination on upcoming referendum. Informed sources revealed to the newspaper that the participants discussed the need to expedite building a unified plan among the southern parties to culminate the referendum with secession. According to the sources, the Israeli envoy engaged in bilateral talks in presence of the US Charge d'Affaires.

Riek Machar investigated on charges of alleged support to Athor

Al-Intibaha 28/10/10 – Informed sources have revealed to the newspaper that a 3-member military body has investigated GoSS VP Riek Machar for his alleged support to renegade Gen. George Athor. According to the sources, the investigation took place yesterday following GoSS President Salva Kiir's interview published by *Al-Sudani* yesterday in which he disclosed that Riek Machar is leading a government within a government.

In another development, the NCP has described as a "lie" what was mentioned in an interview by GoSS President Salva Kiir Mayardit to the effect that the NCP has agreed to the conduct of the referendum before the North-South border is demarcated.

NCP leading figure Rabie Abdul Atti has expressed astonishment over the statement attributed to Kiir, saying such agreement was neither expressed by the NCP nor the Presidency.

Salva Kiir's interview to Al-Sudani (Part II)

Al-Sudani 28/10/10 - FVP Salva Kiir Mayardit, in an interview to the newspaper (Part II), has reiterated that he feels targeted because "one chair can not hold two people". Kiir, whose first part of interview has stirred a wide controversy among Sudan's political circles, has accused unnamed circles in the North and the South of seeking to assassinate him. Kiir said that those in the South who have set their eyes on the presidential chair and are seeking to eliminate him are

“in a hurry” and those in the North who target him are “not happy” with the manner in which he runs the South. He expressed hope for cordial relations between the North and the South if secession is chosen, pledging to safeguard full rights of the northerners in the SPLM and in the South. However, he ruled out that southerners in the North would get similar treatment, saying “I can not guarantee southerners’ rights in the North because the NCP is unreliable”. Kiir reveals that the majority southerners in the south are likely to vote for secession.

Kiir also revealed that he has asked the US Congress to lift sanctions from Sudan, saying he has received a list of conditions for easing sanctions on Sudan including debts in an exchange for concessions on the part of the NCP.

SPLM, NCP close to deal on citizenship and security – Pagan

The Citizen 28/10/10 – the SPLM and the NCP are near to striking a deal on the fate of southerners in the North and northerners in the South after the referendum particularly in the event that the South secedes and establishes an independent nation.

Speaking at the ongoing Governors Forum on Tuesday evening, SPLM Secretary General Pagan Amum said the clusters from both parties discussing citizenship after the plebiscite have agreed on a general frame and are waiting to ink the final agreement.

“Discussions on citizenship have progressed and we are at the stage of developing a general agreement that covers all the categories of our people without prejudice to developing specific agreements like movement of employees and payment of pensions,” Amum said.

On security arrangements, Amum said the concerned clusters have also reached a general framework including the integration of the SPLA and the fate of the JIUs. What is remaining in security arrangements, he said, is in the two states of southern Kordofan and Blue Nile in the context of popular consultations that will determine the type of relationship between the two states and the central government.

Sudan's joint defense forces deny military build-up on north-south borders

Xinhua 27/10/10 - Sudan's Joint Defense Forces on Wednesday denied presence of any military build-up at the contact areas between north and south Sudan, less than three months ahead of south Sudan referendum.

Commanders of the Joint Military Forces, which bring together units from Sudanese Armed Forces and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), held a meeting in Khartoum to discuss recently circulated reports on military moves on the Sudan north-south borders.

"There are not any military moves on the borders and no party has moved its forces to those areas," Gen. Ayuen Alier, spokesman of the joint defense forces, told reporters following the meeting.

"For further information and accuracy, the meeting decided to form a six-member committee from the two sides to find the facts about those claims," he added.

He further said that the joint defense forces would be tasked with securing south Sudan referendum, slated for Jan. 9 2011.

The SPLA, the military wing of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), called on the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) to investigate on claims of military build-up for the Sudanese army on the north-south borders.

The Sudanese armed forces, in turn, accused the SPLA of deploying its troops on the border points and said that the move was a violation of the security protocol between the two sides and a hostile act that would negatively affect the referendum process.

According to *Reuters* 28/10/10, Ayuen Alier said the six-man team had 10 days from Sunday to complete their work then would deliver their report to each army.

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