

Desk of Luka Biong Deng

RoSS Co-chair, Abyei Joint Oversight Committee



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Republic of South Sudan's Co-Chair to the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee Urges the Government of Sudan to Immediately Instruct its SAF troops to Withdrawal from Abyei

Washington, DC: While traveling in the United States to meet with UN and US officials and advocates and to participate in the ***Global Summit Against Discrimination and Prosecution***, Republic of South Sudan's Co-Chair to the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee (AJOC), Luka Biong Deng, expresses grave concern over the fact that local reports of local chiefs and leaders confirm that as of 27th September, Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) have not moved out of Abyei Area as promised by Lt. Gen. Tesfay, the Force Commander for the United Nations Security Forces in Abyei (UNISFA). SAF forces were to withdraw from Abyei Town and move northward and redeploy completely from Abyei by September 30.

Reliable sources from Khartoum reveal that the recent withdrawal commitment reached during first meeting of AJOC in Addis was considered by SAF as only for political consumption. Equally local sources indicate that SAF instead intends to reinforce its forces in Abyei Town with an additional soldiers and that the SAF forces in Abyei Town have not even received directives from Khartoum to prepare for their withdrawal. Others claim they have seen SAF troops relocating North of Diffra as required by the recent agreements. Luka Biong has confirmed that in the meantime, the SPLA Chief of General Staff has already given unconditional directives to his forces to withdraw from the Abyei Area and SPLA forces are now outside the Abyei Area.

During his visit to the United Nations in New York, Luka Biong Deng met with Lt. Gen. Tesfay to confirm the status of troop withdrawals given the mixed information that is coming from the area. Lt. Gen. Tesfay has confirmed that SPLA forces have complied with the withdrawal plan while SAF forces have not started withdrawing but he is confident that they will eventually comply. Luka Biong reassured Gen. Tesfay of the commitment of RoSS to support his mission so that the displaced population could return back to their home areas soon.

"If the GoS is moving away from its commitment to withdraw and this is not just a deadline missed by a few days, it is our profound hope that the Government of Sudan will reconsider its actions and recognize that only a full SAF withdrawal from Abyei shall move the two states to renew the much-needed trust and confidence" stated Dr. Luka. The AJOC Co-chair further explained that "In fact the SAF has no legitimate reason to be in Abyei Town or anywhere in Abyei area and their presence is only serving to bring increased disappointments internally, regionally and internationally. UNISFA

has a force strength of approximately 4200 Ethiopian soldiers and in the last AJOC meeting where the deployment deadlines were agreed to, the UNISFA Force Commander was clear that the SAF forces are not currently adding to the security of the area but that his forces are fully capable of protecting the area to facilitate both the return of IDPs and the start of pastoralist migrations in December.”

Given that Lt. Gen. Tesfay, Dr. Luka Biong and other senior officials find themselves at critical meetings in the United States this week, the AJOC meeting previously scheduled for 22 September shall be postponed and rescheduled to take place on 30th September in Abyei town. The redeployment deadlines, however, remain unchanged and RoSS officials continue to dialogue with the African Union High Implementation Panel (AUHIP) to ensure that these commitments are met.

Additionally, the 20 September visit of Ngok chiefs and elders to examine areas North of Abyei Town for the return of IDPs has been put on halt. Despite these setbacks, RoSS affirmed that it remains committed to the Abyei agreements, will work with the UN and GoS to immediately finalize the Status of Force Agreement mandating the UNISFA troops, collaborate on humanitarian relief (a subject that is being discussed in New York and Washington DC this week), and cooperate in the immediate establishment of the Abyei Area Administration.

Specifically with regard to the Abyei Area Administration, the South has recently communicated with the AUHIP and the Government of Sudan that Khartoum’s recent nominees for the Deputy Chief Administrator for the Abyei Area and the Speaker of Abyei Area Council are unacceptable. None of the nominees are residents of the Area –as required by the Abyei Protocol and the new agreements. Most of the nominees are Misseriya from Muglad, are not residents of Abyei, are not members of the Abyei Area Council, and have played a role in the Popular Defense Force militia and/or the organized settlement of Misseriya into the Abyei Area. The South has conveyed to the AUHIP that it shall not tolerate Khartoum’s attempt to reassert the Misseriya claim through these nominations and change the demography of the area first by occupation and resettlement and then through the exploitation of its governance.

“In all of these efforts to bring a just peace and resolution to Abyei through implementation of the Abyei agreements, we call upon all concerned about Sudan and South Sudan to assist us. We need the international community to ensure that the parties’ keep their word” said Dr. Luka. “There is still time. Not just for the people of Abyei but all those along the North-South border that have seen escalation of violence. They need to know that internationally mediated agreements are more than newspaper headlines.”

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