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Highlights

Local Arabic and English Language Press

177 killed in tribal violence in south Sudan

Reuters 20/4/09 - At least 177 people have been killed in weekend attacks on villages of the Lou Nuer tribe by armed men from the rival Murle ethnic group in south Sudan's Jonglei state, a government official told Reuters on Monday.

"By 4 p.m. yesterday, 177 dead bodies had already been found by our team," the commissioner of Akobo county, Doyak Chol, said. "We are expecting more than 300 by the time all the places have been checked."

A spokesman for the south Sudanese army, Malaak Ayuen Ajok, said it had not yet been able to verify the number of dead but that "it will not be less than 60".

A vicious cycle of cattle raiding and counter-attacks in southern Sudan has plagued the oil-rich region since Sudan's 2005 north-south peace deal ended one of Africa's longest conflicts but left southern civilians heavily armed.

The remote and marshy Jonglei state -- where French oil giant Total holds a massive, mainly unexplored concession -- has been hit especially hard by cattle raiding and related killings that have fractured communities along ethnic lines.

International analysts and officials in the southern government have worried aloud that, as well as disrupting peace, these clashes maintain a divisive atmosphere ahead of planned national elections in 2010 and a referendum on independence for the south in 2011.

In March at least 453 people, mainly women and children, were killed in Lou Nuer attacks on Murle villages, widely understood to have been in retaliation for the theft of 20,000 Lou cattle in January. A large number of cows were also stolen in that attack.

"This time they targeted human beings, not cattle," Chol said, referring to this weekend's violence which he said was conducted by about 500 armed men. "They were shooting indiscriminately. It was revenge."

He did not say how many of the dead were Lou Nuer and how many from the Murle attackers but said the unarmed Lou villages put up little resistance.

In one of the 16 razed villages, many children had drowned in a river as they tried to flee gunmen, Chol said. The attacks began before dawn on Saturday, he added.

UNMIS regional coordinator for the south, David Gressly, told **Reuters** that a U.N. team will travel on Tuesday to the hard-to-reach area to assess security and humanitarian needs following the violence.

A smaller, initial assessment team was sent on Sunday, he added, but was not able to verify the death toll.

A report on the March attacks by a joint team of different U.N. agencies, seen by **Reuters** on

Monday, called for UNMIS to increase patrols in the area and to increase support to local officials to try to improve the dire security situation.

Abyei Arbitration

Local dailies report the Abyei Area Arbitration Tribunal continues sessions for third consecutive day focusing on the ABC experts' report and the border demarcation of the area. The Tribunal has heard both parties' verbal arguments. **Al-Ayyam** reports the government's lawyers argued that since the experts have exceeded their mandate, their report was illegal.

Al-Wifaq reports the government lawyers have taken the Tribunal by surprised when they presented a document showing that Abyei is a 100% northern area. The document claimed since the Dinka have been transported to the area, they are not the original inhabitants. Government delegation legal counsel Abdul Rahman Ibrahim claimed that the NCP's position is stronger. According to the paper, the second and most crucial phase of the case will begin today as the Tribunal will hear testimonies from the VP Taha, the Messeriya and the Dinka.

GoSS Presidency Affairs Minister Luka Biong told **Al-Sahafa** that he was confident that the Arbitration Tribunal would support the experts' report.

Meanwhile, **Akhbar Al Youm** reports SPLM official Yassir Arman stressed to journalists yesterday the need to accept the Abyei Area Arbitration Tribunal decision when it is pronounced so that stability prevails in the area.

Council of States names Abyei representative

Akhbar Al-Youm reports Muneur Deng Mantong was sworn in yesterday as representative of the Abyei Area in the Council of States in the capacity of an "observer".

National Security Bill slashes duration for extra-judicial detention

Al-Sahafa quotes GoSS VP Riek Machar as saying that the parties to the CPA have reached an agreement in principle on the National Security Bill. The bill allows for up to one-month detention of offenders without prior consent of judicial authorities. But Machar, who co-chairs along with VP Taha the Joint NCP-SPLM Political Committee, said that the agreement in principle was rejected at the recent meeting of the SPLM politburo.

Machar also defended the National Press and Publications Bill and pointed out that the penalties allowed in the bill are a "guarantee for a responsible press." He also pointed out that the bill was drafted based on consultations with a group of leading media figures.

Meanwhile, **Al-Ayyam** reports that the parliamentary caucuses of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), the NCP and the SPLM have agreed to hold further consultations on the National Press and Publications Bill in the next few days.

Khartoum Monitor reports the National Assembly approved yesterday the Elections Commission Act, the Health Quarantine Act and the pharmaceutical Act. According to the paper, four bills were tabled including the Press and Publications Bill, the Criminal Procedures Bill, the Civil Procedures and the National Housing Bill and the Reconstruction Fund Bill.

Blue Nile Governor backs unity drive

"Our strength lies in our unity," Blue Nile Governor Malik Agar told an information forum in Damazin yesterday, **Al-Watan** reports. Governor Agar who is also Deputy Chairman of the SPLM noted that only 20 months remain before the referendum on southern Sudan and Abyei and said he does not think that anyone of "sound mind" would vote for the secession of southern Sudan. He called on Sudanese to stand by President Al-Bashir and vote for unity.

In another development, the Council of States has described the security situation in the Blue

Nile State, Kurmuk Locality in particular, as “deteriorating”, indicating that NCP functionaries in the area are in a state of panic due to harassment on the part of SPLA intelligence.

On the other hand, **Akhbar Al-Youm** reports the Council of States has decided to summon the SPLM Deputy Chairman and Blue Nile State Governor Malik Aqar to account for the issues raised by a report prepared by a committee that visited the area recently. The Council of States took this decision at a session yesterday.

SPLM members face disciplinary measures over Kenya meeting

The **Juba Post** 20/4/09 reported SPLM official Yasir Arman as saying that the SPLM members who attended Kenana peace conference shall face disciplinary action. Arman made the remarks in a press conference after his party’s politburo meeting ended last Friday in Juba. “It is unfortunate that Kenana conference was directed against the SPLM and the government of Southern Sudan,” he said, adding that it was also unfortunate that some SPLM members participated in the conference. Arman said SPLM set up a committee to investigate the members who have taken part in the conference and that disciplinary action would be taken against them.

Authorities bars opposition leader Turabi from travel

AFP 19/4/09 reported Sudanese authorities stopped Islamist opposition leader Hassan al-Turabi from traveling to Paris for medical tests on Sunday, an aide told **AFP**.

"Turabi had obtained permission to travel from the interior ministry and a boarding pass, but several security men came and took his passport... and returned to tell him that he was not permitted to leave," Abu Bakr said.

Today, **Al-Khartoum** reports PCP leader Hassan Al-Turabi has described as “surprising” the authorities’ refusal to allow him to travel abroad for medical checks, saying his health condition entails a foreign trip.

Al-Akhbar reports NCP official Qutbi Al-Mahdi as saying that the ban on PCP leader Hassan Al-Turabi’s foreign travels “was based on security not political considerations”. “If the judgment of the security authorities is that Al-Turabi’s foreign trips will create problems and he is likely to engage in hostile political activity then the ban is justifiable” he said.

Sudan amongst leading anti-terrorism states – UN

Sudan Vision reports that the UN Representative for Middle East and North Africa Regional Office, Ehab Al-Minyawi, stated that Sudan has exerted great efforts to amend legislations and procedures relative to international requirements to combat terrorism and other international crimes. Addressing a National Workshop on international bills on combating terrorism in Khartoum yesterday, he lauded Sudan’s initiative to issue the anti-terrorism bill and amending the same to coincide with international requirements.

Sudan requests protection for refugees in eastern Chad

Al-Ayyam reports that Sudan has underlined the need for full UNHCR support for Sudanese refugees in the refugee camps in eastern Chad. Commissioner for Refugees, Mohamed Al-Aghbash, said UNHCR has to intensify protection of the refugees from child abduction by the JEM.

President Al-Bashir to visit Ethiopia today

Local dailies report President Al-Bashir will lead a delegation to Ethiopia today for participation in the Sudan-Ethiopia Joint Higher Committee meetings scheduled to start Tuesday. According to **Akhbar Al-Youm**, the visit comes within the framework of the excellent bilateral relations between the two countries. A range of political, economic and cultural issues will be discussed and about 17 agreements in the areas of exchange of expertise, agriculture, trade, investment,

customs, culture, training and capacity building will be signed.

Civil society organizations to monitor elections

Al-Raed reports the Head of the National Institute for Democracy said that 23 civil organizations have formed a network to monitor forthcoming elections in Sudan and that local observers shall work to ensure a free and fair elections.

JEM to resume Doha peace talks

JEM chief negotiator for the Doha talks, Djibriel Ibrahim, is to hold talks today with the mediators in Qatar over obstacles to the implementation of the goodwill agreement signed with the Sudan government, **Al-Sahafa** reports. JEM official Ezzaldeen Biji said that JEM still maintains it would only resume peace talks if the government meets the conditions it had set.

Websites/International News Coverage

US Senator Kerry endorses peace approach with Khartoum

Sudan Tribune 17/4/09 – US Senator John Kerry left Khartoum to visit the capital of the North Darfur state government, El Fasher, where he offered up the possibility of major concessions to the Government of Sudan.

The senator's visit follows that of President Barack Obama's envoy to the country, Scott Gration, and marks another indication that the new administration is inclined to engage with the Sudan government rather than confront it, as had been feared by some Sudanese officials.

After his meetings with senior officials Thursday evening, Kerry stated "Special Envoy Gration has succeeded in negotiating a strong agreement with the government with many positive elements to address the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Darfur."

Announced by Kerry, Sudan's decision to partially reverse the expulsion order against foreign aid groups in Darfur, if true, would represent a concession to Washington. But no Sudanese officials have corroborated Kerry's claim, and likewise earlier this week US and humanitarian aid officials told Sudan Tribune that Gration had returned from Khartoum having won nothing concrete in the negotiations.

Nevertheless, Kerry told an audience in Khartoum, "We have agreement that in the next weeks we will be back to 100 percent capacity," while adding that not every aid group would be granted to exist as before.

The senator indicated that lifting sanctions against Sudan was entirely possible: "Absolutely. That is entirely on the table. I can't tell you when, that's a decision President Obama makes."

Minnawi says ready to proceed with DPA security arrangements

AFP 18/4/09 (KHARTOUM) — The leader of the major Darfur ex-rebel faction that signed an agreement with Khartoum, said today that his movement is prepared to work on implementing security arrangements outlined in the peace accord.

Minnawi, who is also the senior presidential assistant, said that the SLM is looking for a political settlement of the Darfur conflict that entered its sixth year.

The former rebel leader stressed that the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) he signed in Abuja back in 2006 can incorporate the demands of all the other rebel groups.

He further said that the SLM recognizes all the movements on the ground "whether the signatories or non-signatories".

"We are not saying that we are the only ones out there. We want all parties to be involved in

establishing sustainable peace in Darfur” Minnawi said.

The presidential assistant was touring the town of El-Fasher and some institutions in the area including hospitals and religious schools.

Minnawi statements signal a radical shift in tone regarding the implementation of the DPA which he accused the NCP of ignoring.

Earlier this year he even accused the government of aiding the Darfur Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) attack on his troops at the town of Muhajriya which lead to the displacement of thousands of civilians.

The SLM leader was also unhappy about being excluded from consultation on the Doha talks that took place in February between NCP and JEM.

Minnawi’s SLM faction has been hit by defections and resignation from his commanders and his aides leading observers to believe that he is severely weakened from when he signed the DPA.

UN investigating fraud within its ranks

SABC News 16/4/09 (South Africa) -The United Nations has confirmed that it is investigating dramatic allegations of fraud and misuse of millions of dollars given to it by a donor agency to rebuild the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

An American agency for international development (USAID) claims that the world body's development programme has misused its financial grant on substandard projects and for lavish purchases. Shortly after the US-led overthrow of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 2001, the UN development programme was given a \$25 million grant by USAID to develop infrastructure in that country. The idea was to repair roads, bridges and clinics while creating jobs for the Afghans.

The agency is now reported as having released a shocking report accusing the UN of delivering shoddy construction work there including life threatening bridges, uninstalled equipment and electricity as well as incomplete buildings. And yet all of them were billed as finished projects.

The Agency says UN officials in charge of this project allegedly diverted some of the money to other countries while other funds were improperly used for expenses such entertainment. It is also alleged that criminal and civil cases against the UN officials had to be dropped because they have immunity. The UN says it is investigating these allegations but admits that some abuses did happen and expects to repay no more than \$1.5 million for those.

ICC prosecutor calls for isolating Sudan president

Sudan Tribune 19/4/09 — The ICC Prosecutor Luis Moreno-Ocampo urged the international community degrade contacts with Sudanese president Omer Hassan Al-Bashir.

“On practical terms the states must sever non-essential contacts with Bashir and degrade diplomatic relations with his country and avoid attending any event with him [Bashir]” Ocampo told the London based Al-Sharq Al-Awsat newspaper in an interview. “His personal assets should be tracked and exposed imposing a state of isolation and marginalization on him paving the way for his arrest” he added.

However US officials who visited Khartoum have avoided meeting with Bashir including special envoy to Sudan Scott Gration and Senator John Kerry. The UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon has made no contacts with the Sudanese president since the indictment. An embarrassing moment occurred last month in Qatar during a lunch banquet when the Brazilian president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva declined to sit next to the Sudanese president and abruptly left the hall.

The ICC prosecutor acknowledged that apprehending Bashir may take time but told the newspaper “that his destiny is to face justice”.

He refused criticism that his move against Bashir complicated Darfur crisis through Khartoum's decision to expel aid groups immediately after the warrant. "The prosecutor cannot remain silent on extermination. Silence will not help the victims but will help the criminals" Ocampo said. The Argentinean born lawyer dismissed any talk of a compromise allowing to drop the case against Bashir in return for handing over lesser suspects wanted by the ICC.

"My office does not engage in political negotiations" he said.

Asked about his appeal on the charges of genocide, Ocampo asserted that the evidence in his possession shows that forces following Bashir's orders are deliberately attacking civilians and imposing life conditions intended to bring about their physical destruction.

The judges have yet to rule on the appeal submitted last month. The Pre-Trial Chamber has been reconstituted and new judges have been admitted to review the Darfur case.

ICC prosecutor adds new names to case against Darfur rebels

ST, 19/4/09 — The prosecution at the International Criminal Court (ICC) submitted a new application for the issuance of a summons to appear against rebel leaders suspected of leading an attack on African peacekeepers in 2007.

According to documents published on the court's website the ICC prosecutor Luis Moreno-Ocampo makes reference to a previously unpublicized request filed on March 27 to ICC judges under Article 58 of the Rome Statute which deals with arrest warrants and summons to appear. The redacted filing by the prosecutor last week provides the judges with additional information on questions they raised regarding the initial application against the rebels submitted last November.

The ICC's third case on Darfur, opened in late 2007, investigates an alleged rebel attack on the Haskanita military base that left 10 African Union (AU) soldiers dead and one missing.

The counts against the three unnamed rebel commanders in the case filed under seal included war crimes of violence to life, intentionally directing attacks against personnel, installations, material, units or vehicles involved in a peacekeeping mission and pillaging.

The prosecutor's office has been pressing the judges for months to make a quick decision on the November case citing the good prospects for the suspects to appear voluntarily in court. However the judges at the Pre-Trial Chamber I rejected the requests saying the case is too complex and that they are occupied with reviewing another case against Sudanese president Omer Hassan Al-Bashir for whom they issued an arrest warrant on March 4th. Furthermore the Pre-Trial Chamber I constitution has been changed and two judges were replaced. This generally means that more time is required for the new judges to get familiar with the Darfur case.

The second part of last week's filing by the ICC prosecutor asks the judges for "expedited consideration" of his March 27th application.

"The Prosecution is of the view that given the current real prospects of ensuring the appearance of [Redacted] before the Court, [Redacted], the Prosecution respectfully requests that the PTC expedites its consideration of the Application" the filing read.

Ocampo also ask the judges to issue a summons to appear rather than an arrest warrant on the March 27th case.

It is not clear if the judges will treat the request any differently from the previous one. But this month the ICC prosecutor Fatou Bensouda speaking at the diplomatic hearing said that her office hopes "to have a decision from the Judges this month" on the rebels case.

Bensouda said that given the public stances by the Darfur rebels in which they committed to cooperating with the ICC "judicial proceedings could start soon".

If the suspects end up appearing in The Hague it will likely place some countries particularly African states in a difficult position.

Furthermore some African politicians including African Union (AU) Commission Chairperson accused the court of being biased against the continent in its selection of cases. A meeting of

African ICC members is scheduled in June to discuss withdrawing from the court. But the victims of the attack on the African peacekeepers came from Nigeria, Mali, Senegal and Botswana.

It will be difficult to see the AU not supporting the ICC case against those figures believed to be behind killing of their own troops in Darfur.

The AU Peace and Security Council issued a statement in the aftermath of the attack stressing "the urgent need to bring the culprits to international justice"

SPLM has not decided on running Presidential Elections - Lam Akol

Sudan Vision Daily 19/4/09 - Ex-Foreign Minister and SPLM prominent leader, Dr. Lam Akol Ajawin affirmed that the delay of SPLM in nominating its candidate for Presidency is due to the fact that the Movement has not decided to run the Presidency elections.

Dr. Akol described the security situation in southern Sudan as deteriorating with a critical economical situation.,adding that the southern leader conference in Kenana discussed how to overcome such situations and came out with recommendations to be presented to GoSS President Lt. Gen. Salva Kiir Mayardi.

Dr. Akol has refuted the allegation that he is going to quit the SPLM and to form a new political party.

US agency to support elections in Sudan with USD 25 million

ST 20/04— The United States of America extended a \$ 25 million grant to support the general elections and the democratic transition in the Sudan.

The grant agreement was signed Sunday by the Sudanese minister for international cooperation Al-Tigani Fidail, the chairman of the national elections board Abel Alier and the US Chargé d'affaires Albert Fernnderz as well as William Hammink, the Director of USAID in Sudan.

In a speech delivered after the signing, Alier pledged to work hard on the National Elections Commission, saying "We will work hard to ensure the success of the next election" to be free and fair and in a manner to guarantee the rights of all the concerned parties.

Minister Fidail pointed out that the support of 25 million dollars, is the first batch of U.S contributions in order to enable technically and logistically the elections commission and supports to play its role. It also represents a part of the U.S. commitment in the Oslo Conference to support the electoral process, he added.

He further said that this agreement represents the first direct and non-humanitarian U.S. support to Sudan. It is also an indicator of the US's support for one of the key elements of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, he stressed.

The US Chargé d'affaires Alberto Fernandez said that this support is the beginning of direct and concrete US assistance for 2010 elections and for the democratic transition.

He added that this support is tangible evidence of U.S. interest in the full implementation of the CPA and the democratic transition, pointing out that this support will continue to include the referendum in January 2011.

Sudanese official booed by audience in Uganda on Bashir's warrant

ST 19/4/09 — The Sudanese presidential adviser Mustafa Ismail reportedly got booed by audience at a Ugandan university as he was making a speech on the arrest warrant against president Omer Hassan Al-Bashir. The forum was organized by the Centre for Strategic and International Insight at hotel Africana.

The pro-government Sudanese Media Center (SMC) quoted Ismail as saying that his government wants the support of African countries "to drop the issue of the International Criminal Court (ICC) once and for all".

The Sudanese official said that Darfur is simply a dispute over water, land and other resources

but was inflated by Western media.

“The ICC’s decisions are influenced by propaganda and negative reactions. There has never been genocide in Darfur” Ismail said.

“It is not true that Arabs are trying to eliminate Africans,” he added, to which most Sudanese audience responded with jeers, New Vision website reported.

“The presidential adviser’s speech was full of concoction and distorted information. Bashir will face the mighty hand of justice” David Aleer, a Sudanese law student at Makerere University told the Ugandan newspaper.

Another law student at Kampala University by the name of Rick James said that the arrest of Bashir “is overdue”.

“The atrocities he has committed are crystal clear” he added

A meeting of African ICC members is scheduled in June to discuss withdrawing from the court in response to ICC indictment of Bashir per request from Khartoum.

African states make the bulk of countries that ratified the Rome Statute which founding text of the ICC.

Commentary

Why SPLM failure to nominate a candidate for Presidential elections?

By Gatkouth Deng,

South Sudan Nation 19/4/09, SSN - Reliable information reaching us from Juba indicates that efforts of the recent extra-ordinary meeting of the Political Bureau, the highest executive organ of the Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement (SPLM), which sat for three days from 15th to 17th April in Juba to nominate its top candidate to run for the office of the President of the Republic of Sudan, has unfortunately failed.

Most, if not all, of the SPLM active members around the globe are aware of the importance of the upcoming national elections scheduled for February next year. As a national party and a hope for the marginalized people of the Sudan that yearn for democratic transformation of the old undemocratic system, coupled with inequality, injustice and unbalanced development in the country, the SPLM is set to contest for political seats all over the country in order to capture power even in the Khartoum Palace through the elections. This is in order to effect the transformation of the whole country.

The SPLM shall contest in the Presidential, parliamentary and local government elections in the South, West, East, North and Center of the Sudan in addition to its strongholds of the three contested regions of Abyei, Nuba Mountains and Southern Blue Nile. The SPLM shall contest for the parliamentary seats of the National Assembly in Khartoum to push for a considerable increase of its current small share of 28% representation in the National Assembly to may be over 50%.

It shall contest for governorships for all the Greater Northern Sudan states including for the home state of the incumbent President, Omer Hassen Al Bashir. The SPLM shall also contest for parliamentary seats in all the states of Sudan including the seats for Commissioners of the counties in such respective states.

However, without the SPLM top contestant against the incumbent President, Omer Hassen Al Bashir, as the captain of the ship in this huge task of national transformation, it would be an aborted attempt to effect such a change. Considering the limited time left towards elections, and before which the nominee should get prepared for a huge task of preaching the wind of change throughout the 25 states of the country, delaying the nomination of the party's top candidate for the Presidential elections, to me, retards the SPLM's preparations for the elections at the national level.

I was hoping that the SPLM Political Bureau meeting should have emerged with the party's nominee who would start to take up the huge task from this April. Reliable sources from the South Sudan capital, Juba, indicated that our chairman, comrade Salva Kiir Mayardit, made a dramatic and surprising move that resulted in the failure of the SPLM nomination of its candidate for the office of the President of the Republic of Sudan.

According to the sources, the 27-member of the SPLM Political Bureau nominated comrade Salva Kiir Mayardit to contest against the incumbent President Omer Al-Bashir for the national office of the President. They also nominated comrade Dr. Riek Machar Teny, to run for the office of the President of the Government of Southern Sudan, and perhaps and rightfully comrade James Wani Igga to eye the office of the Vice President of the Government of Southern Sudan.

It is said by these reliable sources that comrade Salva Kiir bitterly refused to run for the office of the President of the Republic of Sudan, and instead chose to run for the office of the President of the Government of Southern Sudan and nominated Dr. Riek Machar to run for the office of the President of the Republic of Sudan. The Political Bureau members insisted that General Salva Kiir should run for the office of the national President in Khartoum, but he continued to bitterly refuse.

Then finally, the members of the Bureau told him he was exercising his right of choice as a person if he did not want to contest at the national level, but asked him to handover the chairmanship of the Party to Dr. Riek Machar and to step down as deputy-chairman so that Dr. Riek Machar contests for the Presidency at the national level.

Comrade Kiir also refused to handover the chairmanship and also refused to contest at the national level at the same time. Sources added that he even suggested that there was no need for somebody to contest for the Khartoum Presidency in the upcoming elections, but was reminded by the Bureau of the need to do that as the party's vision and objectives are concerned.

Dr. Riek Machar is said to have accepted to contest in Khartoum provided that he is handed over the party's chairmanship in accordance with the CPA power sharing arrangements leading to the elections.

The Political Bureau pleaded with the chairman Salva Kiir to reach a consensus with the Bureau by either choosing to contest in Khartoum as the SPLM chairman or to handover the chairmanship to his deputy who would compete against the chairmen of the other political parties in the country. In that way, he was told that he would remain in Southern Sudan and contest for the office of the President of the Government of Southern Sudan.

The chairman surprised the Bureau by totally refusing to reach a consensus. Sources say that the matter is now referred to the SPLM National Liberation Council (NLC), the body that serves as parliament for the Party, to try to resolve the issue next month (May).

It is very unfortunate that the SPLM could continue to disable itself in the face of the soon coming general elections. NLC should study the situation properly and come up with a binding resolution that should be respected and implemented immediately so that the party's nominee hurries up and prepares him or herself for the daunting task which is already at the corner.

Unless the SPLM is not serious about the process of transformation of the country which it always talks about, this delay for internal top nominations will make the SPLM elections look like the last year's failed population census in the South simply because of the disease called "unprepared ness."

Interview

Kerry says ICC case no bar on Darfur peace drive

Reuters 17/4/09 - U.S. Senator John Kerry said on Friday the International Criminal Court's war crimes charges against Sudanese President Omar Hassan al-Bashir should not stop efforts to resolve the Darfur conflict.

"Of course, there is no question it has complicated matters. We'll just have to see where we go along the road," Kerry, who heads the U.S. Senate's Foreign Relations Committee, told Reuters in an interview during a visit to Darfur.

But he said: "The humanitarian issue and the issue of governments working together transcends whatever external factors there may be."

Kerry, leading a congressional delegation to Sudan, said there was an urgent need for a peace deal in the western Darfur region, where he met displaced people and senior members of the joint United Nations and African Union peacekeeping force.

"I could feel the anger in there, the frustration and the anger as the years go by, and I think there is a sense of urgency," the former U.S. presidential candidate said after talks at Al Salam refugee camp.

Kerry made his comments just days after Bashir struck a more conciliatory tone towards Washington by welcoming U.S. President Barack Obama's overtures to the Islamic world. Sudan has viewed the United States in the past as an enemy.

Kerry, who says a new dialogue has been brought about by Obama's special Sudan envoy Scott Gration, suggested diplomacy could eventually result in a lifting of sanctions against Sudan and its removal from a U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism.

"Absolutely. That is entirely on the table. I can't tell you when, that's a decision President Obama makes," said Kerry.

He told a group of about 100 people Washington had reached agreement with Khartoum on a resumption of aid activities, but that the expelled aid groups would not necessarily return.

"We have agreement that in the next weeks we will be back to 100 percent capacity," said Kerry.

"Not every group will be guaranteed to be the same group."

Residents of some camps in Darfur have refused replacement aid administered by local and government-run groups.

Al Salam resident Adam Ahmed Yacoub told Kerry he had been in the camp since 2004 when his town was attacked.

One woman said conditions in the camp had worsened since the international aid groups were expelled, especially for women and children. "The woman is the one who was raped and they are still being raped," she said.

Kerry was told at a briefing by the U.N. and African Union peacekeeping mission that Darfur was now a low intensity conflict with outbursts of major violence but that the border between Sudan and Chad was a major concern.

Chad and Sudan have long traded accusations of backing rebel movements in the border regions.

Tribal dancers and drummers welcomed Kerry at the residence of North Darfur's governor Osman Yusuf Kibir, who told him the United States had the ability to solve the problem of Darfur.

"It is high time for the Obama administration to seize the opportunity to realise peace in Sudan," said Kibir.

Kerry told Reuters this was a message he had received often during his three-day visit.

"Everybody here has emphasised that the United States is the country with the leverage and the ability to make a difference, so we have a responsibility to do that," he said. "It's going to take a lot of lifting and a lot of leverage."