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Boundaries are not barriers, says Abyei Administration to Misseriya and Dinka-Ngok

A series of four Abyei villages' hall meetings was concluded yesterday in the first ever post-court ruling engagement of the area's Administration with the Misseriya and Dinka-Ngok communities. The Administration's message that "boundaries are not barriers" was positively received by some 4,000 participants that welcomed the Abyei leadership's initiative to actively re-engage with the rural communities.

The 22 July ruling from The Hague-based Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) over the disputed area's geographical boundaries was accepted by both the National Congress Party and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement. However, it was reportedly rejected by some "hardliners" who eventually issued threats against the demarcation team.

UNMIS and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) supported the effort of the Abyei Area Administration to visit four payams along key migration routes in an attempt to promote the inter-ethnic dialogue and inform that geographical boundaries must not affect the nomadic lifestyle that has been perpetuated for centuries.

The Abyei leadership was joined by all security organs, such as the police, national security, the Joint Integrated Unit and the Area Joint Military Committee to support the administration's message for peaceful coexistence of all residents and nomadic groups within the area.

Ali Kuku, an elderly Misseriya nomad in Leu, who remembers the 1965 Dinka-Misseriya lethal fighting that displaced thousands, welcomed the initiative. "I thought that the PCA ruling confines us to our area with an "electric fence boundary. Now I know it is not true". Amir Kuol Deng, Ngok Dinka paramount chief, remembered the peaceful co-existence during his father, Deng Majok's reign. "What we need is to re-establish the lines of communication and build mutual trust...if a Berlin Wall is constructed the Dinka and Misseriya will tear it down" he said.

The urgent need for an agreement on security related modalities was highlighted by all members as a priority, in order to facilitate the upcoming Misseriya migration and build trust. Concerns were also raised related to development, access to water, education for nomadic youth, women's development, health and infrastructure.

"An inter-state dialogue with representatives from Unity, Southern Kordofan and Warrap states is the next step, to ensure an arrangement acceptable by all", Acting Abyei Administrator, Rahma Abdelrahman Al-Noor proposed.

**The meetings took place in Leu (10 December), Diffra (11 December), Um Khaer (14 December) and Rum Ameer, (15 December), and were the first of such engagements since The Hague-based PCA issued its 22 July ruling on the disputed geographical boundaries.*

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Participants in Rum Ameer village south of Abyei town



Women, youth, elders, soldiers are briefed on the PCA ruling in Um Khaer, north of Abyei town

Photos: UNDP