

South Sudan Questions Khartoum's Sincerity as Peace Talks Resume

By Peter Heinlein
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ADDIS ABABA - A senior South Sudanese official has questioned Sudan's sincerity in resolving disputes as a fresh round of peace talks gets underway in Addis Ababa.

As the talks were about to resume Tuesday, South Sudan's chief negotiator, Pagan Amum, said his side has come back to the negotiating table with an open mind. At the same time, he said it is up to Sudanese officials to show they are sincere about resolving seemingly intractable issues that led to a breakdown of the previous round of talks last month.

"It depends on the other side. Are they here for peace? All indications are that they are not complying with the U.N. Security Council resolution. They are still bombing South Sudan. They are attacking South Sudan as we speak, and they are violating the Road Map and the Security Council resolution literally in all aspects," Amun said.

On the eve of the fresh round of talks, the Khartoum government announced it would comply with a U.N. Security Council resolution demanding a troop withdrawal from the disputed Abyei region. South Sudan had pulled out a contingent of 700 police officers earlier this month.

Southern negotiator Amum said his team would open this round of talks by listing alleged Sudanese violations of the Security Council resolution and a Road Map for settling contentious issues left over from when South Sudan gained independence last July. He says the list would include the question of Abyei.

"We will put a clear list and matrix of violations by the government of Sudan, including their failure to withdraw their forces from Abyei. We are here also to discuss implementation of the security arrangements as provided for in the road map and the resolution. We are not here to negotiate, we are here to implement," Amun said.

Sudanese news agencies quoted a Khartoum military spokesman Monday as denying Amum's accusations. The spokesman challenged the Juba government to prove the charges and said Khartoum's forces had nothing to do with whatever is happening in South Sudan.

Diplomatic observers Tuesday said it is difficult to imagine a quick resolution given the myriad of complex issues involving borders, oil and citizenship status facing negotiators. One diplomatic observer noted that it has taken nearly a month just to get the two sides to heed a Security Council order to return to the African Union-mediated talks.

A mediation panel led by former South African president Thabo Mbeki has been unable to bring the two sides closer together during several previous rounds of talks. Mr. Mbeki last month described the neighbors as being in a state of war.

The breakdown of talks has led to what diplomats say is the worst outbreak of fighting since South Sudan gained independence.

<http://www.voanews.com/content/south-sudan-conflict-talks/1120790.html>