



# THE SUDD INSTITUTE

RESEARCH FOR A PEACEFUL, JUST AND PROSPEROUS SOUTH SUDAN

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## Weekly Review

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### **Simplifying the Arusha Intra-SPLM Reunification Agreement**

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South Sudan broke apart and plunged into a violent confrontation in December 2013 following bitter disagreements within the top leadership of the ruling Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), splintering the party into several groupings. The conflict shockingly started merely 2 years after the country seceded from the Sudan, in 2011. The violence has claimed thousands of lives and displaced millions others, both locally and to the international borders. The tragedy has not only caught many by surprise given the long history of struggle for statehood in the region, but has also confirmed well expressed reservations especially from the northern Sudanese about South Sudanese ability to self-govern. Since its commencement a little over a year ago, an army of mediators and envoys has been mobilized not only to understand both the proximal and distal drivers of, but also exert efforts to arrest the substantially devastating violence as quickly as possible. The Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), a regional political and economic development block for Eastern Africa, has been in the forefront in these sorts of endeavors. These have been frustratingly slow, nevertheless, with the parties to the conflict showing limited signs of seriousness about ending the violence peacefully. Several other significant processes meant for nudging the belligerent parties toward peace have recently propped up, such as international sanctions, arms embargoes, and intraparty dialogues. A plethora of these initiatives have culminated in a range of agreements, most of them subsequently dishonored by the parties.

Other African ruling parties with liberation background, such as Ethiopia's EPRDF, South Africa's ANC, Uganda's NRM and Tanzania's CCM, and a number of regional think tanks and analysts figured that one of the biggest roadblocks to the IGAD's peace process is the troubles of leadership within the SPLM. They stress that until these internal problems are addressed, it would be difficult to get a comprehensive peace agreement in South Sudan. This reality had increasingly been frustrating not just to the people of South Sudan who have to live with violence on a daily basis, but also to the leaders of the neighboring countries who face similar consequences of South Sudan's war on their own security and economic interests. In light of these immediate spillover effects to the region, the "Intra-SPLM" consultations begun in the Tanzanian city of Arusha under CCM's

facilitation and support from a variety of other entities. This effort recently resulted in a reunification agreement signed by SPLM groups' principals and has indeed excited optimism towards peace, both locally and internationally. While the document does not necessarily address the immediate leadership contradictions in the party with detailed intervention strategies, it touches on the fundamental facets of reforms, many of which have been partly a source of current violent confrontations. This analysis reviews the Arusha Reunification Agreement and attempts to spur public debate on a newly instituted effort towards a genuine search for peace in South Sudan. The remainder of the review summarizes the main points of the Agreement, assesses public response, and sketchily provides some pointers for practice.

## **The Agreement**

Known as the "Agreement on Reunification of the SPLM" (commonly referenced as blueprint), the accord was signed on 21 January 2015 under the auspices of the Chama Cha Mapinduzi, Tanzania's governing party and attempts to reunify the SPLM through a conflict resolution mechanism. A particularly appealing feature of the Agreement is that it commits the warring parties to accept having failed the people of South Sudan. The framework focuses on 44 reforms broadly classified as political, organizational, and leadership. By signing the Agreement the SPLM politically commits to strictly adhering to the cessation of hostilities (CoH) agreement, accelerates the Addis peace process, and apologizes to the South Sudanese general public for failing their liberation aspirations and for assaulting them. The Agreement commits the leaders to public acknowledgement of their individual roles in the genesis of the current mayhem in the country, a way forward in effecting healing and reconciliation.

Other political commitments include investing in reconciliation and healing programs, combating an embattled political corruption, and embracing internal democracy, among others. The organizational capital aspect deals with the party's need for restructuring to engender coherence, discipline, and promote independent, internal bureaucracy within the party's structures. More specifically, the Agreement limits the authority of the party's chair, outlaws a 'show of hands' voting model on contentious matters, and institutionalizes the organization by vesting more powers in the Political Bureau (PB). The Agreement also makes interesting pronouncements to the effect of separating the party from the SPLA, the country's defense force, such that military commanders should not hold positions in the party. The leaders' recognition of this anomaly in their party implies a great turn-around, and if upheld in the agreement's implementation, would go a long way toward the country's democratization.

On the leadership side of things, SPLM commits to limiting chairpersons' term, widens political competition space, adopts general elections for all positions, institutes committees to manage a range of internal bureaucracies, commissions the Tripartite Committee to direct the execution of the Agreement, and authorizes Chama Cha Mapinduzi as a principal guarantor of the Agreement. The Agreement ends with a matrix that details the implementation mechanism for each agreed upon item.

## **Public Response**

Courageously confronting the fundamental contradictions within the party, this Agreement is one of a kind, implying the SPLM's readiness to some form of exorcising. The public response has been largely positive. A South Sudanese commentator, for instance, laments that the Agreement is appealing, stating "the Agreement on Reunification of the SPLM is a great foundation and beginning for the people and nation." Dr. Lam Akol, leader of the Opposition in the government, acknowledges that "The agreement is definitely a giant step forward towards peace, reconciliation and unity of the SPLM." A friend of South Sudan observes he is struck by how business-like the Agreement is. "What struck me as I read through the final agreement was how business-like it is, a very good basis for a solid agreement that will hopefully last. I am beginning to feel optimistic that we may now go on to get a real peace agreement next week in Addis", they remark. Even Dr. Riek Machar expresses optimism, declaring in his VOA interview that the Agreement is solid as "it tackles the issues of accountability and reforms."<sup>1</sup> Most applauded in the agreement is what appears to be the leaders' acceptance to take responsibility for the party's loss of vision, lack of internal democracy, not living up to the people's post-independence expectations of liberation rewards and above all, the agreement to work hard to ensure that measures of accountability and justice are established and enforced. As regards to accountability, it positively caught the eyes of many citizens that the Agreement calls for exclusion from party offices and subsequently from the executive anyone who is found by a competent court to have had involvement in or responsible for atrocities or crimes against humanity.

However, this enthusiasm is not without any doubts. President Salva Kiir, given example, doubts the Agreement will result in a reunification of the SPLM. "...I would like to say (innu) we will continue to work with CCM to learn from their experiences...however...I don't think that we are yet to be united...I will believe it when we sit in one place..." Alfred Lokuji, Juba University Professor, welcomes the Agreement but remains pessimistic in that South Sudan's peace isn't normally substantively constructed using social, political, and cultural forces that would sustain and promote it...If all conditions that shatter peace are not transformed into conditions that solidify peace, then sustainable peace will remain absolutely elusive." Emmily Koiti, a medical student at Juba University, laments what she describes as "the arrogant tone of the agreement that suggests SPLM is the country and the country is SPLM." Other commentaries include the skepticism about the value of rewarding the leaders who have just signed this Agreement with power, despite the bad behavior they have exhibited over the past decade. "It is a bitter pill to swallow, that the same people who ran our country into ground will now return to power and will probably do the same things they were doing in the past," stated a social media commentator. Lastly, pessimistically writing for Sudan Tribune, James Okuk finds contradictions in the reunification of the SPLM, citing lack of rigor in the framework, and suggesting that the effectiveness of this reunification Agreement depends instead on what comes out of Addis.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Individual opinions cited here come from either Development Policy Forum (Ebony Center) or mainstream media, both local and international.

<sup>2</sup> James Okuk, "Critique of SPLM Reunification Agreement in Arusha." SudanTribune, opinion page, January 23, 2015.

Social media is overflowing with these mixed reactions to the agreement, most of it hopeful and some of it questioning the link between it and the IGAD-led peace process, whether the same spirit and humility seen in Arusha will be sustained in Addis Ababa when the next round of peace talks resumes later this week, on January 29<sup>th</sup> 2015. Most unnerving is the apparent disconnect between the SPLM-In Opposition's political class that just signed the reunification agreement and the military commanders of its armed wing. It is also worrying that many people in SPLM-IO, including its top leader, Riek Machar Teny, have been playing up the idea that the Agreement will not deliver if Salva Kiir Mayardit remains the chairman of the unified party. In his meeting to brief his supporters in Nairobi following the Arusha deliberations, Riek Machar stated that since Salva Kiir has acknowledged being responsible for causing the crisis in the country, a total misreading of what President Kiir has said in Arusha, he should just resign. He repeated this in several other media interviews, and it is not very clear whether this is meant to appeal to the president to step down from both party chairmanship and the presidency of the country or a condition to the reunification.

Despite being a commendable step towards attaining peace in South Sudan, a number of sections in the Agreement retain a precarious status quo. Sections 27 and 34-36 in particular certainly perpetuate the biasness of the PB. In 2010, the PB handpicked party flag bearers in the Sudan's national elections, angering many of the party's loyal members and subsequently causing conflicts. Rebellions led by Gen. George Athor Deng and David Yau Yau quickly ensued. Other prominent party members, including Gen. Alfred Lado Gore, Gen. Dau Aturjong, Angelina Teny, and Governor Bakasoro dropped the SPLM and ran as independent candidates. Except the late George Athor and David Yau Yau, the rest of the disgruntled party members later returned to save the region's direly needed unity to secure independence. This condition calls for election primaries across the party's entire membership as a way to secure ascendancy to political power, both internally and generally.

## **Summary**

In sum, it is important to note that the skeptical voices mentioned here are not necessarily opposed to the Agreement per se but merely unwilling to set themselves up for disappointment should the leaders do the usual renegeing on agreed principles. The Agreement has created a climate of hope all over the country, but a sense of skepticism remains, not necessarily due to a weakness in the Agreement itself but mainly because of public mistrust of the country's political leadership. "Why would we expect them to do right by the country this time around, when we have seen them say one thing and proceed to do another over the past year?", inquired another skeptical commentator. Two questions will probably continue to bedevil the minds of most people, namely, how much of the sense of camaraderie that prevailed in Arusha will be sustained in Addis Ababa? How much will the fight for leadership of the party thwart the implementation of the Agreement? If genuine, the Agreement will put the sincerity of the SPLM leaders about peace to test in the days and weeks to come. We recommend that the parties that supported the intra-SPLM dialogue and Agreement, including the Secretary General of CCM, Crisis Management Initiative, Ebony Center and some influential civil society

groups, should sustain continued consultations with the three signatory SPLM factions. As well, more improvements to the framework are needed to finally position the SPLM as a constitutional institution.

## References

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## About Sudd Institute

The Sudd Institute is an independent research organization that conducts and facilitates policy relevant research and training to inform public policy and practice, to create opportunities for discussion and debate, and to improve analytical capacity in South Sudan. The Sudd Institute's intention is to significantly improve the quality, impact, and accountability of local, national, and international policy- and decision-making in South Sudan in order to promote a more peaceful, just and prosperous society.

## Authors' Biography

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