

The Sudd Institute in 2017

January 9, 2018

As we close the calendar on 2017, the Sudd Institute reflects on and takes stock of the happenings of the past year in South Sudan and beyond. We wish everyone a better year ahead. The past year was another deadly year in South Sudan. It has been described by one commentator as the “year our people reached the apex of indignation, agony, and enormous suffering.” The country remained in the news for all the negative reasons. It has also gone through a myriad of unsuccessful attempts to tackle the challenges of violence, the devastation of communal life, economic collapse and political fragmentation. Above all, the country has endlessly engaged in efforts to bring about a rather elusive peace, whether through brokered political compromises between government and opposition or by embarking on the government’s run “national dialogue.” Unfortunately, very little hopeful news has come out of these efforts. Throughout the year, the Sudd Institute has tried to stay vigilant, reporting on these events, criticizing these processes and putting them in their context, all with a view to helping all concerned parties and the public at large make sense of it all.

The civil war has continued to rage, as the government has pursued peace side by side with a military solution; the main armed opposition groups splintered and new rebellions were declared, including the most recent movement called National Salvation Front under the command of a former Deputy Chief of General Staff for Logistics, Thomas Cirilo. All these rebellions and the splintering of all sides into countless parties to the conflict have made it all the more difficult to find any compromise solutions, which is partly why more war has occurred concurrently with multiple peace efforts. The more peace agreements in this fragmented political climate the more elusive the peace has become, as peace pursued in this manner has made many conflict parties view peace agreements as potential avenues to public office, power, and resources. In the process, the conflict parties have prioritized their gains over peace itself, and in doing so, sacrificed the viability of the state itself, together with the welfare of its people, at the altar of political and military promiscuity. A classic example of Solomon’s justice of “Dividing the living child in two and give half to one and a half to the other!” Some locally conceived peace processes and others that were led by international actors, have almost all crumbled under the weight of widespread dishonesty about how much the South Sudanese politico-military elite desire peace. That this has disappointed the people in the country’s leadership is a ghastly understatement.

The year also brought with it events almost unprecedented since the 2013 outbreak of conflict. In 2017, South Sudan witnessed major developments. The first has been the threats of humanitarian disasters only comparable to those in Syria and Somalia. The second was the outflow of nearly two million refugees across the borders into the neighboring countries of Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda. And finally, the crushingly declining economy resulted in an unprecedented inflation, with a vast majority of the citizens losing over 90 percent of their purchasing power. This has not happened before, not even during some of the darkest moments in history since the slave trade. The long periods of struggle for freedom spanning the past 60 years have been horrific, but nothing seems to compare to 2017, not just in the degree of suffering, but more gravely in the diminished hope and

prospects for the future. International actors seem to have checked out on the whole. They have subsequently lost leverage against the country's political class, and no outside pressure seems capable of forcing the South Sudanese leaders into a better behavior. The citizens have continued to lose the political space necessary for any collective civic action and nothing whatsoever is on the horizon to drive any political transition. So, "we sit and wait," as one activist has put it, and more and more people seem to resort to a kind of fatalism, handing over their fate to the supernatural or to religious faith.

On the whole, there is a further decline of the rule of law climate, reduction of trust in the independence of the judiciary, with the security agencies becoming almost a state within the state, and South Sudan drifting further toward both abject poverty and a "deep state." In a hopeful note, however, while the political space has diminished, the year 2017 has seen increasing resort to the arts as a form of protest. Ana Taban made up of a group of young musicians, artists, and poets, has grown in the past year as space where the citizens have spoken about the tribulations and struggles the citizens have experienced. Most civil society activists, journalists, professionals and other civic associations have gone underground or turned to service delivery and vacated the field of human rights campaigns, all to the detriment of this most important arm of the state, but no surrender yet. It seems that the harder the challenges the citizenry have faced the more the seeds of a democratic society will be sowed.

In 2017, the Sudd Institute continued to expand its projects, activities, and outputs. The institute staff participated in events the East African region, Central Africa and the Horn of Africa, presenting analyses of the situation in South Sudan, taking part of peace efforts and joining hands with other civic groups and activists to challenge the status quo and contribute to a culture of debate and constructive criticism, all in hope to building a culture of dialogue as a means to addressing intractable political problems. We held public events in Juba and published weekly reviews, monthly briefs, and quarterly reports. Our researchers were interviewed by local and regional media outlets. We have hosted foreign journalists, graduate students, and other researchers who took the Sudd Institute as their base while conducting their fieldwork. We thank our research associates, including Emmily Koiti, Jok Gai Anai, Philip Wani, Garang Lual Deng, Samuel Garang Akau, James Bol Reech, Mayen Deng Alier, David Jambo, Charline Mariam, Dak Kuany Deng, Nyathon James Hoth, Mayol Aguto Malaak, David Ariik Aguto, Gai Gom Riek, Rita Juan, Gatluak Gatkuoth, Achier Mou, Tong Deng Anei, and Bior K. Bior. We are grateful for their intellectual contribution to our debates. We have benefited from the wisdom of prominent South Sudanese academics and practitioners who have offered us advice and varied perspectives, from Francis Mading Deng to Isaac Chuir and Pauline Riak to Lual Achuek Deng, Spencer Kenyi, Marial Awow and Kimo Adiebo and many others. To public policy decision-makers in government, UN, NGOs and Diplomatic Missions accredited to the country, all of whom have come through the institute to consult, we say thank you for the enriching ideas you have brought to us; hopefully, we were helpful in informing your programs. The Sudd Institute is also grateful to its board—Hon. Atem Garang deKuek, Leben Nelson Moro, and Pauline Riak.

A full review of the Sudd Institute work in 2017 can be found on www.suddinstitute.org

The Sudd Institute is most grateful to its donors and to those who gave us moral and intellectual support, most especially the United States Institute of Peace, BRACED consortium, Montrose International, Cordaid, the Swiss Corporation, the Norwegian Embassy, the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization, and many others. None of what we do would be possible without their support.

Thank you all!

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jok Madut Jok', is centered on a light blue rectangular background.

Jok Madut Jok
Executive Director