



THE SUDD INSTITUTE

RESEARCH FOR A PEACEFUL, JUST AND PROSPEROUS SOUTH SUDAN

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Weekly Review

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On Navigating the Roadmap: A Path Towards Democratization and Prosperity

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1. Introduction

On Tuesday, February 21, 2023, the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGoNU) issued a Press Statement. It provided an update to the public, the region, and diplomatic community on the status of the implementation of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS), while signaling the commencement of the Extended Transition Period through 2025. This is encouraging, marking the second time the Government has made such public announcement in recent time, making public its plans. It also proclaimed the holding of general elections by December 2024, in line with the Roadmap that the political parties recently endorsed.¹ Quoting from the Press Statement, “[t]he essence of the [R]oadmap is to provide time-bound guidance on the implementation of outstanding provisions that are critical to the conduct of the peaceful and democratic elections at the end of the transition period, not an alternative to the R-ARCSS.” On the heels of this echoed declaration, the Press Statement went on to list implementation progress, chapter by chapter.

The Press Statement was also categorical: it did not envision any changes to the current structure of the government. What the parties achieved becomes clear to the reader, and the same goes for what is near completion, and what remains pending or wanting, at least from the country’s avowed move towards democratization and shared vision toward prosperity. Considering that there is no point in crying over the spilled milk, the public should read the 9-page Press Statement with an eye to the future, especially the deep-seated inclination to yearn for a smooth transition. The imperative to identify policy areas should be the beginning of impactful analysis. This Weekly Review, therefore, acknowledges the

¹ [‘There will be no further extensions of the transitional period,’ said Michael Makuei | Radio Tamazuj.](#)

progress made, while focusing on potential, actionable policy measures the parties to the Roadmap are advised to consider.

2. A Glimpse at the Key Issues: The Current Progress and Onward Tasks

2.1 On Surveying the “Little” Progress

From the standpoint of the material progress, we think that point # 2 in the Press Statement, which focuses on “the status implementation of Chapter 1(Roadmap Annex-1)” sheds positive light:

- Under this strand, the Press Statement reveals progress in institutional and legislative reforms, including establishment of structures of government at both national and state levels, review and adoption of a host of legislations that include the Constitution-Making Process, Political Parties Act, National Security Act, Nation Elections Act, and a slew of bills pending the reconstituted Transitional National Legislative Assembly’s (RTNLA) approval.
- In addition, there are several bills under review by the Council of Ministers (CoMs), including the Anti-corruption Act, 2009; Petroleum Revenue Management Act, 2013; Petroleum Act, 2012; and Public Financial Management and Accountability Act, 2012, among others, to improve transparency and accountability.²

In this regard, the Press Statement underscores the intention of the Transitional Government of National Unity (RTGoNU) to work in a cooperative, accommodative, and collaborative working-better-together spirit to accomplish legislative and institutional reforms. The approach of using Select Committees to spearhead certain tasks is worth sustaining and strengthening to steer the next remaining tasks.

2.2 Where Progress Remains Deficient

Anyone reading the Press Statement would see that there remains so much on the table. In particular, the need to activate the mechanisms of Transitional Justice, the non-judicial systems of the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing (CTRH) and the Compensation and Reparation Authority (CRA) to promote grassroots community-community reconciliation, healing, and forgiveness, is evident. This could only be possible with strengthened security services, professionalization of the national army, and the empowerment of the rule of law institutions. While the Press Statement made mention of many aspects, this subsection focuses only on policy aspects deserving corrective actions to smoothen the path towards peaceful and democratic elections.

- Elections do not happen in a vacuum. They need adequate preparations and putting proper safeguards in place. Broadly, conducting a national census and redrawing the constituencies, and promulgating the constitution are among the

² [The Sudd Institute Publications](#)

main ingredients although the latter ‘need not be necessarily a prerequisite for holding of elections.’³

- Enhanced security allows peaceful political canvassing and free conduct of elections. These notwithstanding, security spending and actual outcomes have not been at par in recent years in South Sudan.⁴ Therefore, any eventual demarcation of constituent units, and public safety at polling stations call for enhanced security services, mechanisms, and institutions. This would incentivize voluntary, safe and dignified return and resettlement of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) to their homes and communities in order to participate in such critical nation building processes as elections.
- Up to the time of this Press Statement, South Sudan occupies a lower rank in the World Press Freedom Index.⁵ For the elections to be free, fair, and credible, there is no substitute for the press freedom, freedom of assembly and free speech. This is an area (civic space) that demands real action, going forward.
- Informed electorate also remains vital for the conduct of and for popular acceptance of outcomes. Many citizens remain less informed about the contents of the R-ARCSS. Enabling press freedom and providing resources and space to conduct public opinion research would facilitate citizenry participation in elections, constitution-making process, and other critical aspects of the Revitalized Peace Agreement.

Where there are fears over potential post-election challenges, safeguards must be identified to address both perceived and real concerns. Recent efforts by the government to seek UN support⁶ for elections and the UN’s positive response⁷ are very encouraging. It is in this context that one scholar contends that ‘South Sudan may not be ready for elections, yet democracy cannot wait’.⁸ Indeed, we acknowledge that challenges abound, reinforcing fears that holding elections might create chaos. Yet this alone does not justify postponing elections or prevent people from exercising their democratic rights to vote. Elections, as the above indicators suggest, will likely be conducted by the end of 2024.

³ Akech, J. G. (2022). The ‘permanent’ Constitution need not be a prerequisite for holding elections in South Sudan. *The Sudd Institute (Weekly Review)*

⁴ Mayai, A. T. (2020). Security sector spending and public safety in South Sudan, 2006–2018. *African Security Review*, 29(3), 280-296.

⁵ [South Sudan’s censored media space is forcing journalists to quit the profession | International Journalists' Network \(ijnnet.org\)](https://www.ijnet.org/en/south-sudan-censored-media-space-is-forcing-journalists-to-quit-the-profession/)

⁶ <https://www.voaafrica.com/a/south-sudan-seeks-support-for-elections/6935476.html>

⁷ <https://sudantribune.com/article270055/>

⁸ Akech J. G. (2022) ‘To whom it may concern: South Sudan may not be ready for elections, yet democracy cannot wait’ (AfricLaw) <https://africlaw.com/2022/07/25/to-whom-it-may-concern-south-sudan-may-not-be-ready-for-elections-yet-democracy-cannot-wait/> (last accessed 23 Feb 2023).

If successful, elections may induce social, political, economic, and environmental benefits. They confer new mandate for the winning party, nurture trust in the political system, ensure a leaner government that should free up scarce resources for development⁹ and buttress social protection, while dampening public propensity for what economists refer to as Veblen goods or conspicuous consumption.¹⁰ In this context, we argue that successful general elections can usher in a new political mindset, inversely relating to the agency creation and shopping¹¹ which has come to characterize the South Sudanese public sector in recent years, and undergird sources of unproductive consumption.

3. Concluding Remarks and Policy Recommendations

The piece has taken a forward-looking approach, encouraging the parties to devote more time and resources to implement the R-ARCSS. This includes putting in place adequate safeguards to ensure peaceful elections to mitigate against any post-election violence. In furtherance of the above view, the following five policy choices are recommended:

- The parties should agree to raise funds to conduct the census or at least task the National Bureau of Statistics, and the Elections Commission to collaborate to seek funds from partners. This requires strengthening the leaderships of both institutions, giving them an edge to seek external support for the conduct of both census and elections. To do so, essentially demonstrating commitment, the government should allocate sufficient resources for both processes.
- Move swiftly to operationalize the Political Parties Act, to allow timely registration of political parties and determination of electoral constituencies.
- Facilitate safe, voluntary, and dignified return of refugees and IDPs to their respective states and provide social and psychical security. This requires strengthening local economies (agriculture), incentivizing voluntary return. In addition, the government should consider collaborating with international partners and provide an opportunity for the IDPs to vote where they are, particularly those who cannot voluntarily return to their origins.
- Unlike the 2010 elections, cease from securitizing elections by keeping the army and security forces away from the polls and let the NEC with support from the invited international actors manage the exercise. This also calls for an unrestricted civic space for both the citizenry and political actors.
- Adopt a people's led and owned constitution to institute an accountable governance system. Necessary conversation on the size of government as contrasted with the current "big tent" should be a key part of political parties' consensus prior to the

⁹ [Microsoft Word - Trim the Government JAG Jan 2013.doc \(suddinstitute.org\)](#)

¹⁰ Bagwell, L. S., & Bernheim, B. D. (1996). Veblen effects in a theory of conspicuous consumption. *The American economic review*, 349-373.

¹¹ Garang, J. A. (2021). Agency creation as an instrument of rent-seeking in South Sudan. *International Journal of Economic Policy in Emerging Economies*, 14(4), 360-376.

adoption of the ‘permanent’ constitution and holding of general elections.¹² The conversation must reflect the will of the people of South Sudan on the type and size of the government, the checks and balances, and relevant other safeguards they desire.

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 to promote a more peaceful, just, and prosperous society.

Authors’ Biography

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¹² [Elite Capture and Popular Participation in South Sudan’s Constitution Making? — IACL-IADC Blog \(blog-iacl-aidc.org\)](http://blog-iacl-aidc.org)