



THE SUDD INSTITUTE

RESEARCH FOR A PEACEFUL, JUST AND PROSPEROUS SOUTH SUDAN

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Weekly Review

January 19, 2021

The National Dialogue Final Resolutions: What the Presidency should Do

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I. Introduction

In December 2020, the South Sudan National Dialogue Steering Committee (NDSC) published its concluding report regarding the National Dialogue (ND) process. Drawing from its consultations, conferences, and outputs produced since the process kicked off in 2017, this Final Report summarizes the Committee's main findings and respective recommendations. A vast majority of the views criticizes the SPLM and its leaders for a colossal failure to govern South Sudan. The NDSC asserts that this failure is rooted in a power struggle and political stalemate, which must be broken if the country is to move forward. To break the political deadlock, it recommends that both President Salva Kiir Mayardit and FVP Dr. Riek Machar should now step aside, enabling the country to eventually heal and prosper. If the two cannot step aside right away, according to the views from the grassroots, they should come out openly to declare that they will not run in the coming elections, which are scheduled at the end of the Transitional Period. This particular call has recently stirred significant public debate, with the Presidency's Press Secretary, Hon. Ateny Wek Ateny, accusing the NDSC of overstepping its mandate.

This Review analyzes this debate and provides policy perspectives on how the leadership and the country can actually benefit from the ND's resolutions. In our previous review, we recommended that the National Dialogue Resolutions Implementation Committee (NDRIC) be instituted to guide the government in implementing the ND's resolutions¹. We build on that recommendation here by re-emphasizing the significance of the ND's public pronouncements to the country's current peace process.

II. The Final Report of the ND

The Final Report responds to the people's grand disappointment in their leaders. It presents the single most pointed analysis of the country's disturbing political climate. It asserts that South Sudan is troubled by a 'failure of leadership,' declaring that it only

¹https://suddinstitute.org/assets/Publications/5fc607f47c50b_TheSouthSudanNationalDialogueWhatNext_Full.pdf

makes sense to have the current leaders stepped aside for stability and development to prevail in the country. The manifestations of this failure, according to the Report, include an underlying lack of strategic vision, represented by marked deviation from the SPLM's strategic objectives for which it fought the war, power struggle and political gridlock, runaway corruption, politically inflamed ethnic conflicts, impunity, politically induced economic collapse and deprivation, squandered international goodwill and botched diplomacy, and grave human rights abuses, among others.

The Final Report reaffirms prior revelations about the state of affairs in South Sudan. An IRI survey conducted two months after the independence declaration in 2011 indicated that at least 40% of South Sudanese thought the country was headed in the wrong direction, with only 30% of these respondents feeling very strongly satisfied with the SPLM's performance². In an SPLM field exercise commissioned in 2012 (not published), the citizens indicted the SPLM for a gross loss of vision for which the liberation struggle was waged. It is widely alleged that the findings of the SPLM mission created a rift and fomented power struggle within the party, with the Deputy and Secretary General, Dr. Riek Machar and Pagan Amuom, respectively, accusing the party leader, President Salva Kiir Mayardit, of failing the party and the newly established Republic. A survey of South Sudanese IDPs and refugees in South Sudan, Kenya, and Uganda corroborates this fact (IRI 2014)³. Fifty-two percent of the respondents equated the 2013 crisis with power struggle and the absence of leadership within the SPLM. Finally, in a national study commissioned by the South Sudan Anti-Corruption Commission (SSACC) in 2010, only 35.3% of the respondents thought the government was committed to combating corruption in the country.

III. Reaction from the Presidency's Press Secretary

Some of the Committee's recommendations have been contested, including the suggested resignation of President Kiir and FVP Riek. Not surprisingly, Hon. Ateny Wek Ateny, Presidential Press Secretary, finds this recommendation to be inappropriate. He lamented that the NDSC possesses no mandate to seek leaders' exit from power⁴. He was then quoted in the press as saying: "The revitalized peace agreement is the supreme law in the country because it mandates that if there are provisions of the constitution that contradict the agreement, then those provisions would be deemed to have been null and void so that the provisions of the agreement prevail." He added: "Anything outside the revitalized peace agreement doesn't have the force of law, so whoever asks President Kiir to step down is out of touch with the reality."

While the ND is supposed to be complementary to the R-ARCSS as Hon. Ateny forthrightly notes, the ND embodies a special feature the R-ARCSS does not: it reflects people's voice, which deserves a special consideration. President Kiir himself recognizes the ND's popularity and legitimacy, stating "There is no doubt that the outcome of the

² Survey of South Sudan Public Opinion September 6—27, 2011.

³ <https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2014-12-12%20Survey%20of%20South%20Sudanese%20IDPs%2C%20Refugees.pdf>

⁴ <https://eyeradio.org/j1-rejects-nd-report-that-asks-kiir-and-machar-to-leave-politics/>

national dialogue represents the views of our broad section of society, this means there is no question about the legitimacy of this process," Kiir told delegates in Juba⁵. He added "The issues you raise deserve full attention of your leadership. The National Dialogue has legitimacy - it was a bottoms-up approach. What has been produced in this process must be harmonized with the permanent constitution-making process, which is provided for in the revitalized peace agreement,"⁶. Democratically, as President Kiir concedes, the ND is more supreme than the R-ARCSS, which obviously is a pact between politicians.

Hence, any endeavor to underrate the ND's counsels on political sentiments is not only bound to fail, but it also effectively incites the citizens against their leaders. In this context, any rhetoric that appears to undermine the ND's contributions is an affront to people's will. Essentially, such a rhetoric could be viewed as a sabotage for one of the President's most successful signature projects since the CPA era. We are reminded that the other most successful project President Kiir presided over is the Big Tent Policy, which engendered an enabling environment for South Sudan's independence. The Big Tent Policy, which was instituted in 2006, focused on the South-South dialogue and reinvigorated people's unity in anticipation of the referendum and independence⁷. The Policy led to the "re-absorption and reintegration of nearly all militia groups that had been fighting the SPLM/SPLA on behalf of, and alongside, Khartoum government, following the 1991 split within the movement." While the Big Tent Policy united the people of South Sudan to attain independence, the ND represents people's voice in restoring stability and engendering necessary reforms in the country.

IV. Conclusions

In light of the above delineation of the issues, the Transitional Government and the Presidency in particular should do the following to implement both the ND's resolutions and R-ARCSS. Of primacy is holding the state-sponsored dinner or lunch to honor or thank the ND's leadership for a very successful process. This is also necessary in politically validating the NDSC's work. This dinner should be organized by the Presidency in the next month or so and to be attended by state governors, traditional authorities representing the ten states and three administrative areas, key policy players at both state and national levels, international partners, church leaders and civil society representatives, and regional representatives.

Second, the Presidency needs to establish an independent policy team to study the ND's recommendations very carefully, in turn, offering a policy roadmap for their implementation. An ad hoc approach, as is usually the case, will likely fail the ND and the South Sudanese people. Thus, a team that has the ability to collect, analyze, and make recommendations on the basis of evidence would go a long way in helping the leadership and our people leverage the collective wisdom and gain from the ND. This team, along

⁵ http://t.m.china.org.cn/convert/c_xXMfjE4b.html

⁶ https://www.ss.undp.org/content/south_sudan/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2020/national-dialogue-south-sudan-final.html

⁷ <https://paanluelwel.com/2018/08/04/the-big-tent-policy-factor-in-the-root-causes-of-the-december-2013-crisis-and-the-civil-war-in-south-sudan-part-3/>

with the Minister in the Presidency, would publicly present a government's position on how to implement the ND's recommendations.

Finally, with three years of transition ahead of them, the South Sudanese political leaders have the time to redeem themselves by doing the right thing for the people, including implementing most, if not, all of the ND's resolutions.

About the 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.

Author's Biography

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