

Remarks Following Meeting with President Salva Kiir
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Embassy Juba
Juba, South Sudan
May 2, 2014

SECRETARY KERRY: Well, good afternoon. I just completed an in-depth, very frank, and thorough discussion with President Kiir. And throughout the meeting, I think it's fair to say that both of us spoke very candidly, very directly, and we got to the issues that I came here to discuss. Throughout the meeting, I made it clear to him that he needs to do everything in his power to end the violence, and also to begin a process of national dialogue, a process by which there is the beginning of discussions – real discussions – about a transition government that can bring peace to the country.

It's fair to say that President Kiir was very open and very thoughtful and had thought even before this meeting about these issues, because we have talked about them on the phone in recent days, and because our special envoy and others have had conversations with him about it. So he committed very clearly his intention to do exactly that: take forceful steps in order to begin to move to end the violence and implement the cessation of hostilities agreement, and to begin to engage on a discussion with respect to a transition government.

I just spoke a few minutes ago to Prime Minister Hailemariam of Ethiopia to convey to him President Kiir's willingness to travel to Addis Ababa in the near term, sometime early next week hopefully, in order to engage in a discussion with Prime Minister Hailemariam, and hopefully with Riek Machar, who had previously indicated to the prime minister a willingness to do so. And I hope to talk to him sometime later in the course of today to encourage him to do so.

This meeting of Riek Machar and President Kiir is critical to the ability to be able to really engage in a serious way as to how the cessation of hostilities agreement will now once and for all really be implemented, and how that can be augmented by the discussions regarding a transition government and meeting the needs of the people of Sudan. President Kiir and I have spoken about this many times over the course of the last months. We particularly spoke almost every day during the period from December 15th through the Christmas period. In fact, I even talked to him on Christmas Day, and was particularly pleased today to be able to return to Juba in order to sit down and discuss these issues face to face.

I've told President Kiir that the choices that both he and the opposition face are stark and clear, and that the unspeakable human costs that we have seen over the course of the last months, and which could even grow if they fail to sit down, are unacceptable to the global community. Before the promise of South Sudan's future is soaked in more blood, President Kiir and the opposition must work immediately for a cessation of hostilities, and to move towards an understanding about future governance of the country.

I might also say that we do not put any kind of equivalency into the relationship between the sitting president, constitutionally elected and duly elected by the people of the country, and a rebel force that is engaged in use of arms in order to seek political power or to provide a transition. Already, thousands of innocent people have been killed and more than a million people have been displaced. And it is possible – as we've seen the warnings, because people have not been able to plant their crops – that there could be major famine in the course of the months ahead if things don't change.

Both sides are now reportedly recruiting child soldiers and there are appalling accounts of sexual violence in the conflict. The reports of Radio Bentiu broadcasting hate speech and encouraging ethnic killings are a deep concern to all of us. The United States could not be any clearer in its condemnation of the murder of the civilians in Bentiu or in Bor and all acts of violence, including those that use ethnicity or nationality as justification are simply abhorrent and unacceptable.

If both sides do not take steps in order to reduce or end the violence, they literally put their entire country in danger. And they will completely destroy what they are fighting to inherit.

The people of South Sudan – and I'm talking about all the people of South Sudan – all of them have suffered and sacrificed far too much to travel down this dangerous road that the country is on today. That is why both sides must take steps immediately to put an end to the violence and the cycle of brutal attacks against innocent people.

Both sides have to do more to facilitate the work of those people who are providing humanitarian assistance, whether from the UN or from the UN mission or any organization that is responding to increasingly dire needs of citizens. Both sides need to facilitate access for humanitarian workers, for goods, for cash in order to pay salaries, and they need to provide this access to South Sudan's roads, to its waterways, including to opposition-held areas. And we talked about this very directly this morning with President Kiir and his cabinet members.

It is important that both sides also act to ensure the safety and the security of the humanitarian workers themselves, and both sides must stop dangerous verbal attacks on people who are bravely providing relief to the South Sudanese people. It's unconscionable that people who have come here not with weapons but with assistance are being attacked by both sides, and nothing will do more to deter the international community and ultimately to wind up in an even worse confrontation in the country itself.

Both President Kiir and Riek Machar must honor the agreement that they made with one another to cease hostilities, and they need to remember as leaders their responsibilities to the people of the country. The fate of this nation, the future of its children must not be held the hostage of personal rivalry.

Yesterday in Addis I spoke with representatives from the African Union and South Sudan's neighbors about how we can coordinate and restore peace and accountability. We support the AU's Commission of Inquiry in South Sudan, and I met this morning with the leader of that commission and listened to their early reports of their work. And we support the IGAD's monitoring and verification mechanisms. The United States is also prepared in short order to put sanctions in place against those who target innocent people, who wage a campaign of ethnic violence, or who disrupt the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

Even as we come here in this moment of conflict in an effort to try to find the road that has been obscured, I can't help but remember – as I drove to meet with the president and as I came back here to our Embassy, having traveled here and been here a number of times – but particularly at the moment of self-determination for this country, it is important to remember what the people of South Sudan achieved for themselves recently. Through their efforts, through their commitment, through their patience, they helped to move this country to independence, to the creation of a nation, through peaceful, democratic, and prosperous future, and the opportunity to be able to try to achieve that. And they came together to create a new nation in that effort.

I remember walking in one community and watching people vote and talking to somebody who was standing out in the hot sun and who'd been there for hours. And I walked up to them and said, "Look, I hope you're not going to get impatient. Don't leave. You need to wait to vote." And that person to me said, "Don't worry" – I was then a senator – "Don't worry, Senator, I've waited 50 years for this moment. I'm not going anywhere until I've voted." The dedication that I saw, the commitment of people to try to create this nation deserves to be fully supported and the

aspirations of those people deserve to be met by our efforts, all of us, to try to bring peace, and mostly by the leaders to fulfill the promise that made them leaders in the first place.

It is absolutely critical that to prevent that moment of historic promise from becoming a modern-day catastrophe, we all need to work harder to support the hopes of the people and to restore those hopes. We have to be steady in our commitment to the people of South Sudan. And I was encouraged yesterday in Addis Ababa by the unanimous commitment of the neighbors, of IGAD, of the foreign ministers I met with from Kenya, from Uganda, from Ethiopia, all of whom are committed and dedicated to helping to pull South Sudan back from this precipice and help to implement the cessation of hostilities agreement, and most importantly, help South Sudan to negotiate its way through this transition government that can restore the voice of the people in a way that can give confidence to the South Sudanese people, that their future is indeed being spoken for and that the best efforts are being made to meet it.