

UPDATES ON KHARTOUM ROUND OF TALKS

July 13, 2018

Things are changing in Juba

I was asked by a fellow South Sudanese this morning; “is there still hope for peace from Khartoum as things are changing in Juba”?

In the South Sudanese context, “things are changing” means the local currency is depreciating against the US Dollar. For an average South Sudanese, the exchange rate of South Sudanese Pounds to the US Dollar has become benchmark for measuring progress at the peace talks. When the Pound appreciates, it is an indication that there is progress towards a peace agreement.

The Khartoum Round of Talks made quick progress in the past two weeks where parties signed the Khartoum Declaration Agreement, committing to Permanent Cease-fire agreement and Agreement on Outstanding Issues of Security Arrangements. The value of the Pounds appreciated by over 30%. However, things sharply changed when the parties traveled to Entebbe, held one day meeting on the peace process and returned to Khartoum with a verbal proposal of 4 Vice Presidents, 45 ministries and 550 legislators.

Several groups including the armed and unarmed oppositions, issued statements on the following day rejecting Entebbe Proposal. The Pound immediately commenced its free fall depreciation.

Hope for Peace from Khartoum

Continued engagement: There is still hope for peace from Khartoum for several reasons. First, the parties committed in the Khartoum Declaration Agreement to conclude negotiations in the peace process “as soon as possible to towards the end of the Khartoum Round of Talks”. Second, the parties remain engaged in the process. They shared their written responses on the Entebbe Proposal on Outstanding Issues of Responsibility Sharing. Third, the Mediation Team is working on a new draft proposal in anticipation of consensus and hopefully an agreement on remaining outstanding issues might be signed by July 16, 2018.

Mediation Strategies: First, the Mediation Team consults with each group, political and civic, separately and compiles the outcome of the consultations into a draft proposed agreement. This strategy tends to provide a fairly confidential environment that allows each group to explain its position to the Mediation Team without reservations. Second, they use “single country mediation” strategy. It is Sudan as a country mediating the process and potentially responsible for the outcome – success or failure. If managed in good faith, this mediation strategy limits interference of spoilers especially countries that may partner with some of the parties and harden their positions and stance for compromise.

The oil factor: The “governments” of both Sudan and South Sudan want some level of peace that guarantees flow of oil to revamp their economies. These intertwined economic interests make it partly necessary for the Khartoum Round of Talks to conclude with a peace agreement. While South Sudanese express fear that Khartoum may use its mediation status to manipulate oil deals in its favor, South Sudan’s leaders at the Talks could equally use the oil factor to secure a good deal for South Sudan.

What happens next?

The Khartoum Round of Talks is the second phase of face-to-face meetings between President Salva Kiir Mayardit and Dr. Riek Machar Teny. IGAD mandated President Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya to hold a third round of the face-to-face meeting in Nairobi. So, what happens in Nairobi will depend largely on the outcome of the Talks in Khartoum. If the Talks conclude in Khartoum with agreement on outstanding issues of both Transitional Governance and Security Arrangements, then Nairobi may have an agenda different from the outstanding issues. An agenda item for Nairobi could be the questions of smooth implementation of the final peace agreement.

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