

Independence but no peace: The new state South Sudan is facing great challenges

PRESS RELEASE

8 July 2011

On Saturday, 9 July 2011, the six-year transitional period of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement will come to an end: with the birth of the 54th state on the African continent. It is expected that the young republic of South Sudan will be quickly recognized and will become a member of the United Nations, the African Union and other international organizations. Still, BICC (Bonn International Center for Conversion) points out the difficult situation in the transitional areas Abyei, Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile and calls for a comprehensive reform of the security sector, an effective DD&R (Demobilization, Demilitarization and Reintegration) program and efforts to contain the small arms problem in Southern Sudan by the international community.

INFORMATION:

SUSANNE HEINKE

Phone: +49 228/911 96-44

E-Mail: pr@bicc.de

WOLF-CHRISTIAN PAES,
BICC EXPERT ON DISARMAMENT,
Phone: +49 179-5919869

While the joy over independence after decades of civil war and great sacrifices still prevails in the capital of Juba, the oil-rich country is facing great challenges. These are, for instance, the unclear distribution of oil revenues, the return of hundreds of thousands expelled Southern Sudanese from North Sudan and in particular the future of the three so-called transitional areas Abyei, Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile.

"These territories are regions which lie to the north of the borderline of 1956, but in which large parts of the population took sides with Southern Sudan during the conflict," Wolf-Christian Paes who monitors the developments in Sudan for BICC explains. "During the peace negotiations, the people in these regions were promised that they could decide on their future in a referendum. This promise was never kept."

In the past few years, the focus of international attention has been on the violence in Darfur and the preparation of Southern Sudan's independence. The government in Juba's behaviour, too, was ambivalent; on the one hand, they made efforts not to anger those in power in Khartoum so that they did not endanger their independence. On the other, Southern Sudan still pays the wages of many tens of thousands of soldiers in the disputed areas. "The failure of the United Nations to enforce the demobilization and disarmament of these soldiers and to offer effective security guarantees for the affected population are the backdrop of the escalation of violence in Abyei and Southern Kordofan in the past weeks," Paes continues. "The government in Khartoum has taken this violation of the Peace Agreement as a pretext for invading the affected regions."

But in Southern Sudan itself the situation also remains tense. In many provinces, there are military conflicts with renegade generals who have fallen out with the government. In Juba, too, there are constant rumors about a coup by military circles against President Salva Kiir. After the end of the civil war, the military by no means lost in strength but tripled to more than 250.000 people in uniform—compared to a population of merely eight million. With an average wage of US \$140 a month, members of the security sector are also an economic elite in the desperately poor country where more than half of the population has to live with less than one Dollar a day. “Of course, this relatively good pay is a huge stumbling block to efforts to reduce the number of soldiers, as soldiers have to fear—and rightly so—that they will be dismissed into poverty,” Paes, who supports the demobilization process on behalf of the German government, comments.

According to research by BICC, the government of Southern Sudan spends more than half of its expenditures on wages in the security sector. Money that is missing for the development of the country, for example for the construction of schools, hospitals, and roads. At the same time there is the risk of massive unrest should wage payments cease, for instance if oil exports were interrupted due to conflicts with the North. “There is no alternative to a comprehensive reform of the security sector. The international community must consider an effective DD&R program and efforts for a containment of the small arms problem as a priority in Southern Sudan,” the German expert on disarmament demands.