

Western Bahr el Ghazal rejects Juba's budget cuts

Tuesday 5 June 2012

May 31, 2012 (JUBA) - Western Bahr el Ghazal State on Thursday objected to the reduction in its budgetary from the central government's ministry of finance as part of South Sudan's austerity measures, in response the halting of oil production at the beginning of the year.

Before a transit fee dispute with Khartoum, Juba relied on oil exports for 98% of its income. This is the first time a state government has rejected the allocation they have received from the central government since 2005 when former rebels - the SPLM - came to power in South Sudan as part of peace deal with Khartoum.

Last month a report by the newly-established Sudd Research Institute claimed that South Sudan's ten states receive only **16% of the national budget**, with 84% being spent by the federal government in Juba.

Moris Yel Akol, Western Bahr el Ghazal State's minister of finance, told *Sudan Tribune* that he received a letter from the national Minister of Finance and Economic Planning Kosti Manibe notifying them of changes made in the budgetary allocation.

The lump sum given to all state's will be reduced by 10% in comparison to last 2011 and further cuts will be made calculated by the population of each state based on the 2008 census.

The Ministry of Finance in Juba is yet to comment on the rejection of its budget allocations by lawmakers in Western Bahr el Ghazal State.

"Some states are being affected more than others. Some states are getting decimal reduction while others like the state of Western Bahr el Ghazal State, for instance, gets huge difference. This is where we are concerned. What is the basis of the reduction?", asked minister Akol.

Angelo Mayar, Speaker of the state assembly said reduction in the budgetary allocation was "unjustifiable".

Giir Wol, a member of the state assembly said that the parliament rejected the proposals from the national finance minister they did not see any reasons "justifying" the reduction.

The proposals also included a cut in the amount of money the state receives per capita, based in a 2008 census that was widely contested in South Sudan.

Abraham Dimo Cirilo, another member of the state assembly, argued that as "Western Bahr el Ghazal State is the mother of four states of Northern Bahr el Ghazal, Lakes, and Warrap" and it was receiving many returnees from Sudan after South Sudan's independence it should not face a reduction in the budget.

He pointed out that as a major town Wau, the state capital was home to people from all over South Sudan, including students studying at the university from neighbouring states that do not have higher education institutions.

The 2008 census puts South Sudan's population at 8.6 million people. Western Bahr el Ghazal State has the smallest population according the census with only 333,431 people counted. Jonglei State, which is also the largest in size, had the largest population followed by Central Equatoria, home to the capital Juba.

Warrap and Eastern Equatoria were third and fourth, respectively.

Minister Akol explained that his counterpart at the national finance ministry, Kosti Manibe, had used the contested census result as the basis of allocating resources.

"This is actually what they have used. The general block transfer has now been reduced to 40% from 60% and made little increment in the country development grant from 30% to 40%. It is just a little increase by 10%", explained minister Akol.

"This is not logical allocation if this is what the ministry of finance had used, because the census itself was contested. So why would it be used as the basis of allocating resources", asked minister Akol.

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