

## South Sudan launches human rights forum to address its challenges

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August 14, 2012 (JUBA) – South Sudan has launched a forum to address concerns of human rights as the country tries to clean its image after numerous reports documenting human rights violations in the young nation.

Many national and international human rights groups have produced various reports depicting an unpleasant situation in the 13-month old country and calling on the authorities to correct the state of affairs.

A recent report, entitled, “Prison is Not for Me” launched last week by the African Human Rights Watch decried horrible general conditions in the prisons in South Sudan, which include congestion in prisons, lack of sanitation, poor quality of food as well as weak judicial system that fails to handle court cases professionally and in respect of prisoners’ human rights.

There are also other forms of human rights violations reported by the United Nations agencies and other international organizations, such as attacks against press freedom and civil society.

The government-initiated forum began on Tuesday, involving concerned government institutions, the UN, diplomatic and donor community as well as civil society organizations in the country.

It is hoped those attending will be able to exchange of information on activities and make efforts to improve human rights more efficient and coordinated. The forum will inform the government in a systematic and timely manner on human rights concerns identified by members of the forum.

South Sudan's Vice President, Riek Machar, who launched the forum on behalf of the government, reaffirmed his government’s commitment to promote and protect human rights.

Machar admitted that the human rights situation in the country was not the desired one, calling for the constructive dialogue with the stakeholders to enhance common understanding of human rights and to identify and address the challenges.

He assured the human rights groups of his government's commitment to promote and protect the rights of the South Sudanese people, adding that the ruling Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) struggled for decades in order to achieve the principles that include the human rights.

The chairperson of the South Sudan Human Rights Commission (SSHRC), Laurence Korbandy, lauded country's leadership for supporting the initiative to stamp out violations of human rights in the young nation.

Representatives of the international community also expressed their appreciation to the government for starting the initiative.

Among the issues the forum will tackle include capacity building projects, activities or initiatives undertaken either jointly or individually by the government, UNMISS, UN partners, aid agencies and other partners in furtherance of the promotion and protection of the human rights situation in the country.

The forum is co-chaired by the Human Rights Commission and representative of the civil society organizations with the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) to support its secretariat.

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