

South Sudan education report justifies closure of "woeful" private institutions

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August 14, 2012 (JUBA) - A new government report seen by *Sudan Tribune* has criticised the quality of privately owned higher learning institutions in South Sudan, two months after 22 schools were closed by the ministry of education for low standards.

The report, jointly written by an educational task force from the ministries of higher and general education, thoroughly exposed "the rough, wrongful and woeful situation which some of the private schools are operating".

The task force visited all private schools in the young nation "to verify their registration status in accordance with the national rules and regulations that guide opening of private schools", the report says.

Officials at the two ministries say copies of the report have already been presented to the proprietors of private schools.

Joseph Ukel, Minister of General Education mocked the requirements and stated that the report threw away the general assumption that private schools, especially in Africa, are the best places to study.

"This assumption was proven wrong, as this report by the Ministry exposed the poor status and bad system adopted by some of them, leading to their closure."

Minister Ukel further explained that in a situational analysis as regarding their findings, it was discovered that some of the private schools proprietors, especially those that are closed, illegally opened and reopened in another location using the same licence to operate.

The report found that many private schools operated in buildings that were dangerously overcrowded and were close to noisy places - workshops, markets, waterlogged premises, churches, verandas/corridors unfinished buildings among other places.

More than one school would sometimes operate from the same building adding to the overcrowding.

The closure of the schools two months ago was justified he said due to their lack of classrooms and space; limited number of qualified teachers; poor sanitation and school management; salary issues and unsafe structure among other conditions.

Some schools had been constructed with mud blocks under leaking roofs in private and hidden locations, which could expose children to the risk of sexual harassment, disaster or emergency outbreaks like fire, and dangerous reptiles.

The task force pointed out that proprietors have capitalised on the high demand for education in South Sudan.

Less than 30% of South Sudan's population is literate, a legacy of decades of civil war and underinvestment while the region was ruled by Khartoum. Since a peace deal in 2005, South Sudan has governed itself and became independent last year. However, the government has struggled to create efficient institutions and provide adequate services.

The report was presented to member of the National Assembly, officials and students at the Ministry of General Education in Juba on Tuesday. The closure of the private institutions brought a mixed reaction from students.

Some were please that low standard places of learning had been closed, while others said that government should not close private institutions until state-run education has the capacity to accept the students who now have nowhere to study.

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