

American journalist criticised for describing Kiir and Machar as rivals

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August 23, 2012 (JUBA) - A media official at the office of South Sudanese vice-president criticised a US journalist for describing relations between President Salva Kiir and his deputy Riek Machar as tense, after a figure of \$4 billion stolen by officials was publically contested.

Alan Boswell, the Africa Correspondent for the US-based McClatchy Newspapers, published recently a series of articles critical to the South Sudanese government speaking about its alleged support to the Sudanese rebels and corruption among government officials.

South Sudan's minister of information, Barnaba Marial, described him as somebody working for Khartoum before retracting his statements.

Marial was angered by a report alleging that the President Salva Kiir had written an apologetic letter to his American counterpart, President Barack Obama, confessing that his government supported the SPLM-N rebels against Khartoum.

On Monday, Boswell, published another news story disclosing that a US activist recruited by the United Nations to serve as adviser in Kiir's office had been forced to flee the country after the release of a letter, he drafted, in which Kiir asks 75 officials to return some \$4 billion they are accused of stealing.

In the story, Boswell described the Vice President of South Sudan, Riek Machar, as a "rival in politics" to President Kiir, for publicly disputing the \$4 billion figure as unaccounted for.

When contacted by the *Sudan Tribune* the Vice President's Press Secretary, James Gatdet Dak, said it was unfortunate that, Boswell, decided to use the word "rivalry" as an explanation to the Vice President's public dispute of the figure.

"When I read his publication on Tuesday I immediately contacted him via email and told him that his description was wrong and provocative," he said.

"Yes the Vice President on many occasions publicly expressed his reservation on the \$4 billion figure, which he still thinks was exaggerated, given the fact that there was no any prior investigation done to ascertain the figure. But this does not amount to political rivalry as alleged by this journalist," Gatdet added.

He further explained that an international organization has recently conducted a thorough investigation into the grain scandal and found that the amount paid by the government to both good and bad contracted companies was less than \$300,000, falling short by \$1.7 billion.

The initial amount lost to the grain scandal was thought to reach \$2 billion, which would have accounted for half of the overall \$4 billion that was suspected to have been stolen over the last six years, since the SPLM came to power in Juba as part of a 2005 deal with Khartoum.

However, Gatdet said despite all the explanation, the response he got from Alan Boswell was defensive to suit the interest of his readers. Alan told him that he finally resorted to use the word "political rival" after he struggled with how to explain to his American readers why the \$4 billion figure was disputed by the Vice President.

Boswell's friends say the American journalist is one of those who believe that criticism might help officials in the new nation to be more preoccupied by the difficulties facing ordinary people and working to achieve their welfare after being supported by the international community to get their independence.

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