

## AU mediator urges direct negotiations between Sudan's government, SPLM-N rebels

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September 21, 2012 (KHARTOUM) – African Union's (AU) chief mediator for Sudan, Thabo Mbeki, has called on the country's government and the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Movement North (SPLM-N) to negotiate directly, a local newspaper reported on Friday.

According to the Khartoum-based Arabic daily Al-Sudani, Mbeki demanded that the two sides sit directly and without preconditions as opposed to the current situation where their talks are conducted through the AU High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) which he chairs.

Indirect negotiations between the Sudanese government and the rebel group it has been fighting since last year in the country's border regions of South Kordofan and Blue Nile did not produce anything so far except an unimplemented agreement that to allow humanitarian assistance in the two areas. Political talks remain unproductive as the two sides continue to accuse each other of lacking seriousness and Khartoum insists that the SPLM-N must sever its alleged ties with South Sudan.

Al-Sudani also reported that Mbeki is conducting contacts with the government of South Sudan to persuade it to cease alleged support to the rebels. The paper quoted anonymous sources as saying that Mbeki asked South Sudanese officials to raise the issue with President Salva Kiir.

South Sudan denies its support to the rebel group that fought as part of the southern army during the second Sudanese civil wars 1983-2005 which ended with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that paved the way for South Sudan secession in July this year.

Meanwhile, the head of the government's negotiating delegation, Kamal Obaid, told reporters on Friday that unless the political and military connections between the SPLM-N and South Sudan are severed there will be no dialogue. He further stressed that the SPLM-N must also refrain from talking in the media about toppling the regime through alliances with other rebel groups.

The SPLM-N forged an alliance in November last year with three rebel groups from Sudan's western region of Darfur and vowed joint military operations to topple the government in Khartoum.

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