NBGS deplores categorization of 14 mile as international border

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October 8, 2012 (JUBA) - Officials and legislators from South Sudan's State of Northern Bahr el Ghazal on Sunday vehemently condemned categorisation of 14 mile area as international border, stressing that any attempt to impose a deal without consent of the state would return the two states would never materialized.

The reactions come after Minister of Parliamentary Affairs, Michael Makuei Lueth, said on Saturday at a weekly media briefing by *Al Masir* Arabic daily newspaper that 14 mile area is an international border and that concerns about it requires high level attention at the central government.

the minister was reacting to questions asking why the government negotiating delegation, during the talks over the outsatnding issues, allowed 14 mile area to be included in the demilitarized zones while the area has never been part of talks in the past.

"The issue of 14 mile is not an issue of Malual Dinka. It is an international border," Lueth told audience at a briefing he was addressing as guest speaker. The official explained that the arrangement was not intended to demarcate borders but to allow further discussions and suggestions on the way forward.

"This is just a temporary arrangement. It does not demarcate borders," minister Lueth explained. But various officials and prominent members from Aweil community have regarded categorization of the area as international border as "highly offensive and direct insult" to participation of the people from the area during the war of liberation struggle against successive Khartoum based governments.

"Such statements show clearly the lack of knowledge of the area by most government officials. They actually do not know where this area lies. It also portrays attitudes and beliefs that would return our state and country to a harmful and regrettable past. It will not bring peace because there are consequences attached to such a unilateral decision. Issues pertaining to land should never be taken lightly just like appointing cabinet members. This is about people and their rights to land," Jacob Dau, a national member of parliament told audience during a consultative community on Sunday.

Kuol Athuai Hal, commissioner of Aweil North said citizens of the area have already made their position known to the government that the issue would require returning to the negotiating table with Sudan.

"The inclusion of the 14 mile area on the negotiating table was really a great surprise to all members of the state. It was a shock because the 14 mile area has not been a part of the disputed or claim areas between the two countries. It was never a part of the post-referendum issues," said Hal.

The talks over the outsanding issues and the operationalisation of a buffer zone were stalled for months because of the claims of the two sides over the ownership of this grazing land on the boeder between East Darfur and Northern Bahr el-Ghazal states in Sudan and South Sudan.

The Rezeigat pastoralists of East Darfur have addressed similar accusations against the Sudanese government of neglecting to defend their rights over 14 mile and sent a delegation to Addis Ababa where they met with the mediation.

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