

Mbeki blames media for the confusion in Sudan's cooperation agreement

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October 15, 2012 (JUBA) - The chair of the African Union High Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) said media "failure" to inform the public on the vital elements of the cooperation agreement signed last month between Sudan and South Sudan is responsible for the current confusion on the deal.

Thabo Mbeki, in a letter also obtained by *Sudan Tribune*, described as "shameful" and "embarrassing" for the media's failure to sensitize its readers, listeners and viewers about the agreement, which was concluded in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa.

"It is very shameful and embarrassing that, to the contrary, the bulk of our media essentially ignored the signing of the Sudan-South Sudan Co-operation Agreement, treating this immensely important African development virtually as a non-event," said Mbeki.

"This represents a failure by the media to inform its readers, listeners and viewers about a matter vital to Africa's future," he added.

The former South African leader further said it was a "grave" mistake for any stakeholder to ignore the landmark African agreement, adding the act could create the perception that "Africa's future continues to be decided by forces outside our continent, thus giving substance to the charge that as Africans we are incapable of resolving our own problems."

Mbeki's remarks come less than a month after South Sudan's President Salva Kiir and his Sudanese counterpart, Omar Al Bashir signed a numbers of agreements after months of intense negotiations in accordance with the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution 2046 and the AU Peace and Security roadmap.

The agreements, concluded on 27 September, define such matters as; reciprocal security arrangements, economic arrangements, treatment of each other's nationals, the demarcation of the common border and the resolution of border disputes, ensuring the political boundary between the two states does not hinder all-round human interaction across this border, making this a "soft border as well as the guarantee of the rights of the nationals of each state temporarily or permanently resident on each other's territory.

The deal constitutes an agreement negotiated and concluded by Africans whose implementation will make it possible for the UN Security Council to determine that the conflict in this part of Africa has ceased to be a UN Charter Chapter VII threat to international peace and security, Mbeki said.

In South Sudan, there has been widespread discontent among the population on the agreement, with most criticism focused on the inclusion of Mile 14 in the demilitarised border buffer zone.

Paul Malong Awan, the Governor of Northern Bahr el Ghazal, other officials and civilians from the state have openly said the area is not in dispute and should never have been included in the demilitarized area 10-kilometre either side of a nominal border proposed by AU mediator.

But senior officials from South Sudan ruling party (SPLM), including its chief negotiator, Pagan Amum insist those critical of the deal do not understand it, adding that as the inclusion of Mile 14 in the buffer zone will have no bearing on border demarcation, which the two sides and the AU and UN Security Council have agreed upon.

Meanwhile, a group of angry protestors, on Monday, clashed with police forces in the South Sudan capital, Juba with the police firing live bullets to disperse the protest.

The protestors, mainly from Northern Bahr el Ghazal and the disputed Abyei region, have openly expressed anger at the just-concluded Addis Ababa peace agreement, which they claim "sold their lands" to the neighbouring Sudan.

No casualties were, however, reported from the incident, which police bared the media from covering.

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