

N. Bahr el Ghazal calls for election of community leadership

Monday 29 October 2012

October 26, 2012 (JUBA) - A Northern Bahr el Ghazal community group, made up predominantly of members of the business community, on Friday called for a snap election, questioning the state leadership days after calling on the state governor Paul Malong Awan to retract his negative statement about a contentious demilitarised zone which is a stipulation of one of the agreements recently signed by Juba and Khartoum.

"The need to elect new leadership is very important at this moment. Our community is losing direction because of lacking leadership. Nobody is directing them. Everybody is coming out to speak on behalf of the community because there are no clear structures", Lual Bol Kuan, a spokesperson of the group supportive of the cooperation agreement with neighbouring Sudan told *Sudan Tribune* on Friday.

In September Juba and Khartoum signed a series of agreements in Addis Ababa, which included the establishment of a demilitarised zone between the two nations. Many citizens of Northern Bahr el Ghazal and neighbouring states saw the agreement as an encroachment upon their land and took to the streets of Juba to protests.

The South Sudanese government stated that the inclusion of the 14 mile as part of the buffer zone was a temporary measure to allow international observers to assess the area and said a programme would be set up to educate citizens and members of the government on the agreements.

Kuan accused governor Awan of using the community as ladder to advance his "own interests." He also claimed that the community leadership has not sat since it was appointed in 2003 to discuss issues pertaining to the area.

"We are calling for fresh elections for the community leadership because the one that we know still has no mandate. It was just an interim body. It was not an elected body," claimed Kuan.

According to Kuan, Awan is yet to organise a community meeting bringing together the people from throughout the state because he fears being "exposed to" the people of Mading Aweil and there has not been a leadership election because "he is aware he might not get elected."

He accused the governor of running the state "like a military barracks" and putting its citizens "at loggerheads" with the government in Juba. Part of the problems, according to Kuan, is that Awan went straight to the press to express his objection to the 14 mile agreement, rather than discuss it with the community. Kuan claimed that Awan's opposition to the Juba position necessitates his resignation.

Chief David Garang Malong Yor also declared his support for the agreement and said, in reference to his service during the Sudanese civil wars, President Salva Kiir "would not give up the land for which he took up arms twice." Yor issued a statement declaring his agreement with politicians expressing their concurrence with the deals signed between Juba and Khartoum.

The Minister of Trade Commerce and Industry, Garang Diing Akuong; and Minister of Telecommunications and Postal Services, Madut Biar Yel are blamed by the business group for having not brought to the attention of the president and the cabinet reservations held by their constituents in the cabinet.

Speaking to a meeting of MPs from his state on Monday Awan is reported to have said: "We must support the president. We also need to support our negotiating team but we must make it very clear that we will not accept any attempt to claim our land. We will fight the person who will take our land and the person who will give our land."

Pio Tem Kuac Ngor, a former presidential advisor and currently an appointed member of parliament to the National Legislative Assembly with Kom Kom Geng, Ajonga Akol and other members are equally blamed for not doing enough to achieve support for the proposal in the state government.

Geng and the two cabinet ministers, who are also members of parliament, and Ngor with other members from the two houses voted in support of the agreement when it was passed. Garang Mawien, a native of Northern Bahr el Ghazal living in Juba dismissed claims cited by Kuan and "his cohorts" expressing his appreciation to the press "for allowing them to speak their minds" and describing them as "traitors".

Deng Thiep Akok, a former Aweil North county commissioner also expressed his rejection of criticism of Governor Awan for opposing the security arrangement of the cooperation agreement.

"Malong has done what any leader would have done. I am sure those opposing him would have done exactly what he has done if they were in power," Akok told *Sudan Tribune* on Friday.

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