

Germany's delayed investment conference for Sudan to go ahead

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January 8, 2013 (KHARTOUM) - A Sudan investment conference will go ahead in Germany this month after being called-off following the storming of its embassy by protesters in Khartoum last year.

The decision was a blow to Sudan, which is trying to attract foreign investment to avert a crippling economic crisis which has been worsened by the loss of its lucrative oil reserves after South Sudan seceded in 2011.

The Berlin conference, which was originally scheduled for October, is now planned for January 29.

Officials from South Sudan, keen to attract development in their country torn apart by decades of civil war, are also expected to attend.

Berlin earlier shelved the event after hundreds of protesters attacked the German embassy and set it on fire to demonstrate against a film mocking the Prophet Muhammad.

The amateur film sparked angry protests and widespread condemnation across the Middle East after it was posted online.

The protests in Khartoum, led by hardline Islamists, also targeted the U.S. and British embassies.

Germany later agreed to reschedule the conference after Sudanese Foreign Minister Ali Ahmed Karti apologised and provided land free of charge to rebuild the embassy.

The conference is seen as a rare opportunity to promote greater economic cooperation with reluctant Western firms.

Germany is one of the few European countries remaining on good ties with Sudan.

However, most Western powers continue to shun Sudan due to a U.S trade embargo and the country's worsening human rights record.

Its President Omer Hassan Al-Bashir is also facing charges of war crimes in Darfur at the International Criminal Court.

Last year, Norway and Turkey both cancelled similar events after the United States refused to attend.

South Sudan shut off its oil supply last January, after claims Sudan was stealing oil revenues.

The South now controls about 75 percent of the once united country's reserves, leaving the Khartoum government struggling for alternatives.

The neighbors agreed in September to restart cross-border oil flows but a border dispute is hampering negotiations and tensions remain high.

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