

## Unity state pupils begin South Sudan primary certificate exams

Wednesday 13 February 2013

By Bonifacio Taban Kuich

February 12, 2013 (BENTIU) - Over 2,000 pupils began sitting for their primary school certificates on Monday in Unity state and the other nine states of the young nation, which for the first time have been developed within South Sudan.

South Sudan gained independence from Sudan in July, 2011 and the two nations have signed a memorandum of understanding permitting South Sudanese students to continue their studies with Sudanese curriculum in the north for two years.

However, the deal has not been implemented after the two countries came close a return to war over the disputed of Heglig/Panthou border area in April last year.

Relations between the two sides have been sour since South Sudan stopped exporting its oil through Sudan over a year ago due to a transit fee disagreement.

The deputy director of quality and promotion, examinations and assessment innovation in Unity state, James Bol Top, says the 2013 tests were selected by examination committees in the state and forwarded to Juba for approval from the federal ministry of general education and higher institutions.

“Now this year we [South Sudan's 10 states] were given the chance to have our own examinations but next year it will be a unified examination for the whole South”, said Top.

South Sudan has received high numbers of returnees from the north after independence, the majority of whom studied in Arabic, the predominant language in Sudan.

During a six-year interim period from 2005 to 2011 both Arabic and English were the official languages of Sudan. Despite the large number of South Sudanese who have studied in Arabic, the government chose not to keep Arabic as an official language.

Authorities in Unity state say Arabic students will be forced to switch to English as it is the only language used in the national curriculum.

However, primary school students that *Sudan Tribune* spoke to on Tuesday said they were impressed by the first examinations from the new South Sudan syllabus.

Chadop Gatluak Tulong, a 16-year-old pupil studying at Liech Primary School, said he was proud to take exams designed in South Sudan rather than the north.

Nyariek Nyier Gatluak, a 15-year-old pupil from Good Hope Primary School in Bentiu, says her vision is to compete with boys in terms of education and do better than them in the exams. She called on parents to allow their daughters to continue learning in order to bring wealth after their education.

“A girl who is educated cannot be equal to an illiterate girl. A girl if she is educated, she will be better than a girl who is not educated”, said Gatluak.

Many girls do not complete their education in South Sudan as they are married at a young age or are employed to help their mothers at home or in the fields.

South Sudan is believed to have the worst literacy rate in the world, behind even Mali and Niger. A July 2012 report by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) found that less than 2 percent of the population has completed primary school education, with adult literacy estimated to be just 27 percent.

However, primary school enrolment has increased dramatically in recent years, more than doubling from 700,000 to 1.6 million between 2006 and 2010.

(ST)