

IGAD-Plus prepares draft

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April 2, 2015 (ADDIS ABABA) – The IGAD-Plus peace initiative under a new expanded mediation mechanism has prepared a draft proposal for a final peace agreement which would be the last opportunity for South Sudan’s two warring factions to restore peace to the young country.



South Sudanese foreign minister Barnaba Marial Benjamin talks with members of the opposition delegation after a special consultation in support of the IGAD-led peace process in Khartoum on 12 January 2015 (Photo: Reuters)

Leaders of the two sides, president Salva Kiir and his former deputy turned armed opposition leader Riek Machar, are believed to fully accept the new draft proposal by the regional Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and strike a final peace agreement during the next round of peace talks in mid-April.

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has threatened the parties with sanctions which include asset freezes and a travel ban on individuals obstructing the peace process; however that has not yet been implemented.

According to rebel sources, an IGAD consultative committee has left for Juba on Wednesday to meet Kiir ahead of peace talks, expected to resume soon in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa.

IGAD chairman and Ethiopian prime minister Hailemariam Desalegn on Wednesday met with Machar where the two leaders discussed the new IGAD-Plus peace initiative and the way forward to end the conflict.

An unofficial source said the next round of South Sudan peace negotiations will be brokered by IGAD along with African Union, UN, EU, Troika and China.

The peace talks are expected to resume between 10 and 18 April, a rebel official in Addis Ababa told *Sudan Tribune* .

The last round of peace talks collapsed on 6 March when the two principal leaders could not agree on almost every outstanding issue.

IGAD, which had been brokering the peace process between the two rivals since January 2014, has so far been unsuccessful in brokering a deal to end the ongoing conflict in which tens of thousands have died and millions displaced.

RUMOURS OF A RESHUFFLE

Meanwhile, a rebel official has downplayed rumours that Machar will step down as the leader of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement in Opposition (SPLM-IO) and will be replaced by the chief negotiator Taban Deng Gai.

The claims, circulated on different websites on Wednesday, said Machar has accepted the reshuffle and will step down as early as mid-April when he will officially announce it before the leadership council.

However, SPLM-IO deputy chairman for foreign relations Ezekiel Lol Gatkuoth told *Sudan Tribune* that the reports were a lie, claiming they were an April Fool's Day joke.

"The leadership of the SPLM/SPLA is united under the leadership of Riek Machar. All the military high command council, political leaders and traditional leaders are fully behind Machar," said Gatkuoth.

REBEL MEETING

Machar has also called for a meeting of all political and military leaders of the movement to be convened at the Ethiopian-South Sudanese border.

According to the rebel officials, the meeting will be held in the second week of this month, tentatively from 10 to 15 April in Pagak, a rebel-held town in South Sudan near the Ethiopian border.

Machar will consult with the leadership on the peace process and expected to review the rebel's position ahead of resumption of a new round of talks with president Kiir's government.

Another major issue for discussion according to the rebel official is to resolve an alleged internal dispute among the leadership and other unspecified problems the movement is currently facing.

The rebel official declined to give details of the dispute within the party.

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