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Africa - Sudan

End the silence

Thousands 'choose peace' on anniversary of South Sudanese independence

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Warring parties urged to pull back from the brink as UN resolution deadline looms.

Citizens from South Sudan and Sudan have today been joined by human rights activists, civil society organisations and faith leaders from around the world in a united call for peace within and between the two countries. The global campaign – We Choose Peace – is backed by over 150 organisations including the African Council of Religious Leaders, the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, the Enough Project, FIDH, IKV Pax Christi, the Norwegian Refugee Council, Refugees International, Reporters Without Borders and Secours Catholique and marks the 1st anniversary of independence of South Sudan.

The campaign calls on the United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU), the League of Arab States (LAS) and other influential governments to do all they can to persuade Sudan and South Sudan to resolve outstanding issues between them. This means adhering to the AU's Roadmap for Peace and complying in full with UN Resolution 2046, agreed on May 2, which called for an immediate end to hostilities, withdrawal of forces and a resumption of negotiations at the AU.

The UN set a deadline of August 2 to resolve outstanding issues between the two countries including oil, borders, returnees and the disputed territory of Abyei. It also explicitly called for the Sudan People's Liberation Movement - North (SPLM-N) and the Government of Sudan to reach a negotiated settlement on security in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile states, and enable humanitarian access.

Mr. Edmund Yakani, Programme Coordinator at Community Empowerment for Progress Organization (CEPO) in Juba, South Sudan said: "With only three weeks to go before the deadline for compliance with UN Resolution 2046, now is not the time to lose hope and condemn the world's newest country to failure. Now is the time to act. We are coming together today to say to our governments, and to their brothers and sisters in the AU and League of Arab States, that citizens on both sides of the border and around the world want an end to the fighting."

Peace rallies and other events are taking place around the world, including in Washington DC, London, Berlin, Toronto and Rome. Placards bearing the slogan 'We Choose Peace' will be displayed and in some locations citizens will cast votes for peace in a giant ballot box. Thousands of people are also taking part in online campaign actions via Twitter and Facebook, photographing themselves with the slogan 'I Choose Peace' and asking decision makers at the AU, UN and in key governments if they do too. Since South Sudanese secession, failure to resolve key issues and tensions between the two countries and within Sudan itself has led to an escalation of conflict and the threat of a return to all-out war. Fighting in Sudan's Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile states has exacerbated instability in the border areas and caused a humanitarian crisis in Sudan and in refugee camps in South Sudan. Journalists and aid workers have been denied access and many of those affected are cut off from the rest of the world. Meanwhile anti-government protests have been taking place in Khartoum and throughout Sudan, during which hundreds of people have been detained.

Arnold Tsunga, Vice President of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) said:

"There has been too much suffering, too much bloodshed, and there is too much to lose to let this crisis carry on or escalate. There must be an immediate cessation of hostilities, humanitarian access to affected populations in Sudan, and protection of civilians. The UN, AU and others must help realise this through facilitating meaningful political dialogue and exercising tough diplomacy."

Dismas Nkunda, Co-Director of the International Refugee Rights Initiative said: "The leaders of Sudan and South Sudan need to honour their responsibilities to their people and respect the human rights of all their citizens, especially those displaced from their homes by ongoing violence. That is essential for sustained peace. If they fail to choose peace by complying with UN Resolution 2046 and following the AU roadmap then the international community must get tough and resort to punitive measures. It would be nothing short of a tragedy if the gains of the past few years, and the hopes of so many people, were thwarted by pointless war."

Photo : In Washington, a protestation calling to the end of the violence between the two Sudan (AFP/Nicholas Kamm)
