



The South Sudan Civil Society Forum

March 1, 2021

To the Citizens of South Sudan,

Dear Fellow Citizens,

Re: Open Letter 1 –The Status of Peace Implementation

1. Introduction

The South Sudan Civil Society Forum (SSCSF) writes to you following the eve of the first anniversary of the Transitional Period of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS). This letter aims to update you on what is happening with the implementation of the 2018 Peace Agreement.

SSCSF, with a nation-wide membership of over 200 diverse and independent civil society organizations and individual activists, has represented you in the peace process right from the High Level Revitalization Forum (HLRF) and now in the implementation mechanisms of the R-ARCSS.

The Forum held numerous consultations throughout the country, engaged in radio talk shows, social media and channelled your voices to various institutions of the agreement. It is therefore obligatory for SSCSF to report to you the status of implementation of the R-ARCSS, one year into the Transitional Period and about 29 months since the signing of the Agreement.

The purpose of this letter is to inform you about prospects for peace in our country through the implementation of the 2018 Agreement by the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (RTGoNU) and its constituent parties. This letter also intends to draw your attention to active citizenry in pursuit of lasting peace in the country.

2. Missed Opportunities during the Transitional Period

Fellow Citizens, the R-ARCSS is a framework for peace in South Sudan. It was agreed upon by parties to the conflict and endorsed by stakeholders including faith-based leaders, civil society, academia, women, youth, business community and eminent persons.

If implemented on time, the Agreement would have established and strengthened the government to deliver on its core mandate of protecting us, our property and our country. Public institutions at all levels of government would have been reformed and strengthened to deliver social services to South Sudanese. It would have also allowed internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees to return home voluntarily, in safe and dignified manner.

Through transitional justice processes in the Agreement, families and individuals offended and aggrieved during the conflict would have gotten an opportunity to seek justice. We would have also engaged in a process of truth, reconciliation and healing to overcome the pains of the past and unite across our diversities to build a peaceful, just and prosperous South Sudan.

True implementation of the peace agreement would have enabled us to write a new constitution and prepare for democratic elections to elect leaders of our choice at all levels of government in our country.

3. Status of implementation of the R-ARCSS

Fellow citizens, we regret to inform you that progress made in the implementation of the peace agreement, over the last one year of the Transitional Period, has been very limited and mainly elite-based and Juba-centric. We are disheartened at the extent to which the Agreement has failed to offer you anything tangible so far, whether peace or peace dividends.

The parties formed the executive of the national government, appointed state governors, and allocated responsibilities (positions) among themselves for state and local government institutions. The national executive of RTGoNU was structured into five ministerial thematic clusters, each headed by a Vice President. Despite the disruptions related to COVID-19 pandemic, these institutions including the Council of Ministers have been operational.

After one year of delays, the parties to the Agreement have started reconstituting state governments. By the time of writing this letter, appointments were made for officials in the executive arm of Central Equatoria, Warrap, Northern Bahr el Ghazal, Unity, Western Bahr el Ghazal Jonglei and Western Equatoria state governments.

A National Constitutional Amendment Committee (NCAC) reviewed several laws and drafted them into bills for enactment. These legislative bills were submitted to the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs for presentation to the Council of Ministers and subsequently to the parliament for enactment, as part of numerous reforms envisaged in the R-ARCSS.

Fellow Citizens, the remaining provisions of the Agreement which are crucial to our lives have not been implemented over the last one year of the Transitional Period.

The 2018 Agreement provided for restoration of permanent and sustainable peace, security and stability in our country envisaged through training, graduation and deployment of national unified forces to take charge of security. Sadly, there is little progress to report on this front.

During our visits to the unified training centers, we confirmed that the training was supposed to last for sixty day. However, the trainees have been in the training centers for over fourteen months and there is no clarity on when they would be graduated and deployed.

A comprehensive national plan to facilitate and support repatriation, rehabilitation and resettlement of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnees in a voluntary and dignified manner has not been developed. Lack of plans by the government, looming insecurity and poor services continue to discourage IDPS and refugees from returning home.

Reconciliation and healing of our society, especially through transitional justice mechanisms of the Agreement did not move an inch in the whole first year of the Transitional Period. .

We should have been engaging in writing a permanent constitution for our country to address unsettled matters of governance, wealth sharing and elections. This too has not formally commenced.

Radical reforms and transformation in public financial management systems to promote transparency and accountability in the utilization of our national resources have not been accomplished. Commitments in the Agreement for much needed reforms, restructuring and transformation in the civil service, security sector, judicial and electoral systems have not been meaningfully realized. The commitment to devolve powers and resources to state and local government levels, closer to us throughout the country, still remains only on paper.

The Agreement provides for representation of women by at least 35% in constitutional posts. Unfortunately, out of 264 officials so far appointed in governments of seven states, only 33 (12.5%) are women. At the national level, this 35% was not also met and the former Incumbent Transitional Government of National Unity (ITGoNU), dominated by Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) is the main party that consistently undermined this commitment of the Agreement.

4. Effects of slow implementation

Fellow Citizens, in the slow and selective implementation of the agreement, the one year-old R-TGoNU has done very little to develop sufficient administrative, institutional, systemic and security capacities to effectively govern the country and address the multiple challenges facing South Sudanese.

Security situation

The country is beginning to lose the gains made in implementation of the Transitional Security Arrangements (TSAs). Reports by the monitoring mechanisms of the Agreement – the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation (RJMEC) and the Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements, Monitoring and Verification Mechanism (CTSAMVM) indicate that forces assembled in both cantonment sites and training centers have been deserting those facilities due to unbearable living conditions and wilful neglect by the parties to the agreement.

Within the last one year of the Transitional Period, the parties have been accepting and even promoting on the national television, the defections of forces who are supposed to be unified within the framework of the Agreement. The defections amounts to recruitment, hence violating commitment of the parties in Article 2.1.8 of the Agreement, to cease recruitment of forces. Acceptance and promotion of defectors on the national television also amounts to violation of commitment under Article 2.1.10.4 to refrain from offensive, provocative or retaliatory actions such as dissemination of hostile propaganda, recruitment, mobilization, redeployment and movement of forces.

In Moroto unified training center, these defections resulted in serious fighting among forces affiliated to the SPLM/A-IO and defectors allied to ITGoNU, especially in September and November of 2020, undermining Agreement commitments to cessation of hostilities. The fighting also resulted in loss of lives of our fellow citizens, some of whom were your close relatives.

At the community levels, inability of the RTGoNU to provide adequate administrative controls and security to civilians gave way for numerous armed violence that resulted in destruction of lives, property and villages; abduction of women and children, raping of women and girls; displacements of populations and disruption of means of livelihoods of our populations. In our interactions with many of our fellow citizens, especially in the affected areas around the country, they reported living in fear and not having seen the “Juba-based” Agreement helping to improve their conditions.

Fellow Citizens, instead of using the provisions contained in the agreement to address major security issues affecting the country, RTGoNU relies on *ad-hoc* interventions of holding political, elite-level and Juba-based dialogues. While doing so, conflicting groups in the communities and villages continue with the menace. Moreover, the dialogues are concluded only at closing ceremonies and their outcomes are never seriously implemented.

Meanwhile, the United Nations has found evidence that senior army and elite politicians are providing weapons to communities¹. The country is yet to witness any action by the RTGoNU to hold to account individuals or groups responsible for the flow of combat grade weapons to civilians involved in killings, cattle theft, abductions of women and children and destruction of villages.

While the forces under unification desert cantonment and training centers, civilians roam the villages, so armed and powerful that local government authorities and available government security cannot manage to contain them. In some parts of the country, for example Tonj East County of Warrap State, selective and poorly planned disarmament of civilians resulted in more violence and loss of lives; leaving heavily armed civilians in control of villages.

We are repeatedly told by the parties that our country has no resources to fund the implementation of the agreement, especially the security arrangements. However, we see hotels in Juba demanding millions of dollars of our national resources in accommodation bills from the RTGoNU. We equally witness heavy spending of our national resources on very expensive luxurious vehicles. With priorities, these resources would have helped in the implementation of many aspects of the Agreement.

Economy situation

Fellow Citizens, we measure progress in the R-ARCSS not by elite- and Juba-based activities but by the level of improvements the Agreement brings to your living conditions in your respective locations. Generally, the economic situation has continued to worsen since the signing of the Agreement and particularly over the last one year of the Transitional Period.

By the time Agreement was signed in September 2018, the exchange rate of South Sudanese Pounds (SSP) against the United States dollar was about \$1 to 200SSP in the parallel market, today \$1 equals to 340SSP. And it has further plunged to \$1 equals 650SSP, raising market prices on goods and services far above the reach of ordinary citizens who are not usually paid salaries for months.

¹ UN Panel of Experts on South Sudan Interim (2020) Interim Report. Available online: https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S_2020_1141.pdf

These difficult economic conditions cause some institutions of the RTGoNU to improvise means to extort money from the already struggling citizens. For example, many illegal roadblocks are set up along major roads in the country to illegally extort money from travellers and businesses. In Juba city, driving licences and logbooks are routinely confiscated from drivers, especially female drivers and *boda-boda* riders and they are charged to pay thousands of pounds, in most cases without receipts. This happens in complete disregard for the economic situation citizens face.

Humanitarian situation

Current statistics on humanitarian situation indicates that over 8 million of our citizens, including 4.3 million children are in need of multi-sectoral humanitarian assistance; 4 million remain displaced including 1.6 million IDPs and 2 million refugees in the region². The statistics further reveal that 1.3 million children are at risk of acute malnutrition, 3.3 million people lack essential health care services, 5.2 million people lack access to safe clean drinking water and 3.1 million children can miss basic education in this year alone. This statistics puts our humanitarian crisis among the worst in the world. Evidently, the Agreement is not being implemented to robustly address these multiple humanitarian crisis in the country.

Political situation

Fellow Citizens, there is no clear political agenda and direction for our country. The R-ARCSS as a political program, is not being responsibly implemented. A complimentary solution was sought through the South Sudan National Dialogue, from December 2016 to November 2020. Substantial amounts of resources were invested from national and foreign sources and many of you participated in this National Dialogue at different levels – grassroots consultations, regional conferences and national conference. This too is now being abandoned with no commitments to implement its outcomes. Further still, the vision of the struggle for the liberation and independence of our country “...for justice, freedom, equality, human dignity and political and economic emancipation³” should have been the foundation of our country’s governance. But again, our leaders have abandoned that vision too.

On the political land scape, there is clearly no difference between parties that have been in government and those supposedly fighting for fundamental reforms in our country. We engage with all the parties directly and in the oversight and implementation mechanisms of the agreement and we can report to you with certainty that the calls for reforms no longer feature prominently anywhere in the discussions of the leaders of our country.

² UNOCHA (2021), Humanitarian Needs Overview. Available online at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-acute-food-insecurity-and-acute-malnutrition-situation-october-2020> and Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (2020), Available online at: http://www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ipcinfo/docs/South_Sudan_TWG_Key_Messages_Oct_2020-July_2021.pdf

³ As stipulated in the very first paragraph of the Declaration of Independence of South Sudan – Available online at: <http://orgsouthsudan.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/FULL-TEXT-OF-DECLARATION-OF-INDEPENDENCE-2011.pdf>

As South Sudan remains politically weak, it becomes increasingly vulnerable to aggressive encroachment on our sovereign territories by some neighbouring countries. This is another potential source of future crisis in the country.

5. Our Conclusions

Fellow Citizens, from our analysis of the situation, we have reached a conclusion on the following important issues:

- (1) Economic, security, political and humanitarian situations in our country continue to worsen, imposing unbearable suffering on the population over the past one year of the Transitional Period. There is no predictable indication showing that the situation will change for the better any time soon, under current conditions of the peace implementation.
- (2) The bloodshed and the suffering of the people as a result of the deteriorating security, economic and humanitarian situations in the country are likely to worsen unless the government takes urgent and responsible measures as outlined in the Agreement and also in the Resolutions of the National Dialogue, to restore sustainable peace, security and stability in the country.
- (3) The people of South Sudan have used the agreement, the National Dialogue and other peaceful means at their disposal to repeatedly remind the parties and the government to improve the situation in our country, but nothing significant has changed. The region and the international community who sympathize with our conditions have equally called on the parties to implement the agreement, but the parties remain selective, slow and inconsistent in implementing the peace agreement.
- (4) Our participation in the agreement as your representative voice only makes sense as long as the implementation of the agreement is carried out in a manner that improves the security, economic, humanitarian and human rights situations for you; and ultimately unite our country and put an end to the bloodshed. We contend that we cannot be an endorsement to the continuous extension of your suffering, the destruction and mismanagement of our national resources through willful inconsistencies in the implementation of the peace agreement. To that end **Fellow Citizens**, we will reconsider our participation in the oversight and implementation mechanisms of the Agreement.
- (5) Given this situation in the country, we invite you, **Fellow Citizens**, to do your part and play an active citizenry role towards ending the persistent suffering and continuous bloodshed in our country. Specifically, we call on you to:
 - 5.1 Demand of the government and its constituent parties, full implementation of the Agreement and measures that would restore stability in your respective localities.
 - 5.2 Take charge of peacebuilding in your respective communities including holding dialogues to resolve any disputes and normalize relations.
 - 5.3 Identify, disown, name and shame perpetrators of violence in the community and use appropriate mechanisms at the community, state or national levels to stop them perpetuating further violence and destabilization.

#SouthSudanIsCalling