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May 26, 2014

*Excerpts of Remarks made by U.S. Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan Ambassador Donald Booth on May 22, 2014 at a Telephone Conference Hosted by the African Media Hub*

**SPECIAL ENVOY BOOTH:**

Thank you, and thank you all for joining us today. I thought I would confine my opening remarks to discussion about the efforts to restore peace to South Sudan. That is the issue that I have been focused on very intently since the 15<sup>th</sup> of December when the crisis began, and I want to just pick up where the Secretary of State, John Kerry, made a trip to the region at the beginning of the month. He met in Addis with regional foreign ministers of IGAD and then travelled on to Juba on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May.

The efforts that we were trying to bring about was to move the talks which had been underway in Addis since early January, to move them to a stage where we could make a breakthrough, to truly achieving a discussion of real implementation to the cessation of hostility that was signed in January and also the beginning of a political dialogue to address the underlying political issues. As a result of the Secretary's trip which was built on much effort by the IGAD mediation team headed by former Ethiopian foreign minister Seyoum Mesfin and others, the two leaders President Salva Kiir and opposition leader, former Vice President Riek Machar agreed to come to Addis to meet face to face and on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May they met in Addis and signed an agreement reiterating their commitment to the cessation of hostility. They also agreed very importantly to begin the political talks toward a transitional arrangement for the establishment of a transitional government to bring South Sudan back from the brink of this conflict.

So we have seen the signing of that agreement between the two leaders on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May. Some fighting has continued, but it has been at a much lower level that had occurred after the signing of the initial cessation of hostility in January. The key to achieving the real cessations of hostilities will be deployment of monitors, monitoring and verification issues established by IGAD. Those monitors are now in the field in South Sudan. They had been put in the field to operate in a benign environment. Since that did not exist, they were constrained in what they could do, but now the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) has begun to provide security so they can get out and monitor who is violating the agreements, who is doing what on the field. This will lead to a greater respect for the cessation of hostility. The mediators will soon be resuming talks in Addis to focus on the political issues underlying the conflict and issues that need to be addressed to establish a transitional government. Let me leave it there and then I can answer questions further on if possible. Our first question will go to a journalist at the Watch Party at the US Embassy in Khartoum, Sudan. Operator, please open the line.

**MEDIA:** This is Muthana Al-Fahal from Al-Intibaha, a daily newspaper in Khartoum. My question is, the Sudanese government, they are saying that the Sudanese rebels in South Sudan are fighting with [inaudible]. So what does Mr. Booth think about that and how will it be a danger after they sign the agreement. Thank you.

**SPECIAL ENVOY BOOTH:** Thank you very much for that question, because it brings up the issue of adherence to the cessation of hostility agreement and it also brings up the question of the deployment of a regional force to join the UN mission in South Sudan, so that the monitors who are out there to monitor the cessation of hostilities agreement can more effectively do their job. We are in the final stages right now of working with IGAD and the United Nations to get the force from the region deployed to South Sudan and the

purpose of the deployment of that force will also be to ensure that one of the other commitments of the cessation of hostilities agreement, which is the withdrawal of foreign forces from South Sudan, can then be implemented. So getting this regional force deployed to South Sudan is a critical element. It should happen in the very near future and then should give no excuse for further operation by foreign forces unilaterally in South Sudan.

**MODERATOR:** Thank you. Our next question goes to a journalist at the Watch Party at the US Embassy in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Operator, please open the line.

**MEDIA:** Thank you, my name is Omer Redithe Spanish News Agency correspondent in Addis Ababa. Ambassador Booth, you mentioned that effort recently has been to make breakthrough with peace talks in South Sudan, especially with the coming of President Kiir and Riek Machar to Addis Ababa and signing the cessation of hostilities agreement. As you said, there has been fighting going on still. Do you think that breakthrough has been achieved, if not, what is your government's position in the way forward? Thank you.

**SPECIAL ENVOY BOOTH:** Well as I said, there has been fighting since the May 9<sup>th</sup> agreement was signed, but at the time it was signed, the forces of the two sides in certain areas particularly around Bentiu were in very close proximity to each other. What we have seen is compared to prior to the May 9<sup>th</sup> Agreement, the level of fighting between the two sides has indeed declined and a process is underway now to give the monitoring and verification mechanism information that it needs to identify the disposition of the forces so that they can begin to work to ensure that the forces are separated. That was part of the agreement on May 9<sup>th</sup> as well, was the disengagement and separation of forces. So, the monitors will be able to oversee that. The deployment of a force from the region, as part of UNMISS to provide security to the monitors to do that is critical and that will happen in the next week or so. So the process of achieving a verifiable cessation of hostility is moving forward now with much greater progress than we have seen in the past. So I think there has been a breakthrough as a result of the President and the opposition leader signing the agreement themselves and getting orders out to many of their troops to begin the disengagement process, and we need to continue to press on the implementation of that agreement and also to hold those who would undermine that agreement, as well as the previous cessation of hostilities agreement, accountable for their actions.

**MEDIA:** My name is Sebit Abdu, a radio journalist with Radio Miraya. My question is about the, according to the human rights report that states that the killing in Bor and Bentiu can be termed as a genocide. But when we look, or the concern comes in that the killing or the fighting started before, but the US government as a strong institution has delayed in terms of intervention that's why all of these atrocities happen. Why did the US take that long to come in for the intervention before the atrocities happened? Thank you.

**SPECIAL ENVOY BOOTH:** Well I would take issue with your assertion that we delayed in intervening in this crisis. Since my appointment as Envoy at the very end of August of last year, I traveled twice to Juba before the conflict and met with all of the parties trying to figure out a way to help them find a way to resolve their political differences peacefully and through the political process.

Unfortunately, despite our best efforts and efforts with them, that did not succeed and on the 15<sup>th</sup> of December there was the outbreak of the conflict in Juba where there were many many people that were killed. In the days immediately following December 15<sup>th</sup>, and in the fighting that broke out through particularly the eastern part of the country, the States of Jonglei, [inaudible] and upper Nile over the subsequent month. I was immediately in the region, arriving there – I was in Juba by the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December, and spent almost two weeks there working with the government, working with the mediation efforts from the IGAD and in particular with Ethiopia, trying to get the parties to agree to come to a talk to try to find a peaceful way to resolve the conflict. We had been engaged very directly and at very senior levels. There have been a number of calls from senior US government

officials, including many by Secretary Kerry himself over the Christmas/New Year's period to try and bring about an end to the fighting. We got the negotiations through IGAD auspices underway in early January, and unfortunately the fighting did continue despite the efforts to convince the parties to respect their own obligations. I traveled with the IGAD mediators on two occasions to visit with Dr. Riek Machar, and several visits to Juba as well to engage the government to try to find a way to get them to respect the cessation of hostilities agreement.

We were very pleased that Secretary Kerry's visit out there in early May finally got the agreement of two protagonists to come together, the president and Dr. Machar in Addis to recommit. Since then the level of fighting has declined. The killings that have occurred, indeed UNMISS has done very good work on the human rights violations to resolve the fighting and the AU African Union established a commission of inquiry to look at the issues about what has happened with a view toward both accountability and reconciliation. We have been very supportive of the effort of the African Union commission of inquiry, headed by former Nigerian President Obasanjo. And we continue to support those efforts and those to document what has happened, because at the end of the day, South Sudan in order to return to peace will need to have reconciliation and justice.

**MODERATOR:** Thank you. Our next question was submitted by a journalist from Radio Victoire in Lome, Togo. This is directed toward Ambassador Booth. On May 15, a court in Khartoum sentenced a young Sudanese Christian woman of 27 years to the death penalty for apostasy. The young woman, 8 months pregnant, is currently detained according to Amnesty International which called for her immediate release. A few days ago, several embassies, including the US, expressed their deep concern about the case of the young woman and requested that the government of Sudan respect the right of people to change faith or belief. Beyond these calls, how is the US planning to prevent the coward murder of the woman?

**SPECIAL ENVOY BOOTH:** Well let me say I want to reiterate the very deep concern we have about the charges that have been brought against her and the sentences that have been handed down by the Sudanese courts to date, and we have raised this case at very high levels in the Sudanese government and we will continue to express our concerns in trying to bring about a situation where the government of Sudan will ensure that its citizens enjoy the rights that they have under their own constitution. So that will be the main thrust of what we are trying to do, is trying to ensure that Sudan applies its own constitutional protections to its citizens and we will continue to engage with the government on this case as we remain very concerned that no one should have their freedom to choose the religion that they wish to worship, how they wish to believe, circumscribed by laws that are particularly laws that are in conflict with the constitution.

**MODERATOR:** Our next question comes from a journalist at the Watch Party at the US Embassy in Khartoum, Sudan. Operator, please open the line.

**MEDIA:** This is Asmaa Al-Suhaily from Akhbar Al-Youm newspaper. My question is what is the problem between the Special Envoy for Sudan and the Sudan government? What are the reasons that lead to reject his entrance in Sudan? And is it a reasonable reason? Thank you.

**SPECIAL ENVOY BOOTH:** Well, let me say that I, as the US Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan, have had many engagements with senior officials of the government of Sudan. We have had many opportunities to discuss the issues between our two countries. I have met on several occasions, particularly on the margins of negotiations in Addis, for the two areas where we have met with the Sudanese delegation to discuss how to try to bring about resolution of the conflicts in the two areas, as well as in Darfur. We have also talked about ways of engaging between our two countries, to try to address the underlying issues that have resulted in the current relationship that we have.

I just recently met in Oslo on the margins of the South Sudan humanitarian conference with foreign minister Kerti and we discussed – I expressed to him our continuing desire to meet and have a constructive engagement,

trying to find a way to address the issues between our two countries and we will continue to look for ways to expand the dialogue so that we can resolve some of these issues that have plagued the relationship between the United States and Sudan for so many years. But I would just like to reiterate that the fundamental issue we have in the relationship has to do with the way that the government has treated the people of Sudan, particularly those in the periphery. The violence that has been perpetrated against civilians in southern Kordofan, in the Blue Nile and in many parts of Darfur is unconscionable. Aerial bombardment, attacks on the ground against civilian populations, attacks on hospitals and schools – these are the things that are of tremendous concern to the United States. If we are to address the issues in our bilateral relationship, these are issues that also have to be discussed.

**MODERATOR:** Our next question comes from a journalist at the Watch Party at the US Embassy in Ethiopia. Operator, please open the line.

**MEDIA:** My name is Addis Getachew and I work for Anadolu News Agency. My question is directed to Ambassador Booth. The UNHCR and FAO are warning of an impending famine in South Sudan. Actually the UNHCR and the FAO put the number of the people needing relief at four million people. What is the US doing to avert this?

**SPECIAL ENVOY BOOTH:** I am glad that you asked that question. The danger of pending famine is something that I first flagged at the IGAD summit meeting on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March in Addis and we have, the United States, working with our troika partners, the UK and Norway, as well as the European Union and other donors have been making it clear that we need not only to have resources to deal with the humanitarian disaster unfolding in South Sudan as a result of the conflict – a manmade disaster. But, we also need to have the cooperation of the parties. In Oslo over the past two days, there was a humanitarian conference that was organized, there were pledges of an additional 600 million dollars made, including 291 million dollars by the United States to assist those displaced by the fighting in South Sudan, those displaced internally as well as those who have been pushed across South Sudan's borders into neighboring countries as refugees. So the international community is stepping up to the plate and is doing what is needed to make resources available to mobilize delivery mechanisms. But as was stressed repeatedly at the conference in Oslo, without the cooperation of the parties, assistance will not reach those people who are at risk of famine, who are at risk of serious disease. We need the cooperation of the parties. We need the fighting stopped so that this humanitarian assistance can move. The cessation of hostilities agreement of the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January had a provision for opening of humanitarian corridors for cooperation with the humanitarian assistance delivery.

This was reiterated in an agreement that the parties signed in Addis in early May to allow for 30 days of tranquility so that business could move and farmers could plant. This was reiterated by President Kiir and Dr. Machar again on the 9<sup>th</sup>. The ability to avert famine, to avert widespread malnutrition, disease, really rests on the cooperation of the parties. The weather in South Sudan is not cooperating either. We are now into the rainy season, so delivery of assistance by barge is absolutely essential. Air deliveries are underway. They are exceedingly expensive, and are not always able to reach the people in need. We really need to have the cooperation of all the armed parties on the ground to respect international humanitarian law and to facilitate the work of those trying to deliver life-saving humanitarian assistance.

**MODERATOR:** Our next question comes from a journalist at the Watch Party at the US Embassy in Juba South Sudan. Operator, please open the line.

**MEDIA:** My name is Nichola Mandil from Eye Radio, an independent radio station in Juba. President Kiir, when he returned from Ethiopia, said he was forced by the international community, including the US government, to sign the agreement. He also mentioned that he was forced to postpone the election from next year 2015, to 2018. Is that the position of the US government to see that elections are postponed? Do you see

any valid reasons for President Kiir to postpone the election? And is it true that it was the US government that forced President Kiir to sign the agreement with Machar? Thank you very much.

**SPECIAL ENVOY BOOTH:** Let me take that question in two parts. First, the two leaders met. They met with the chairman of IGAD, the prime minister of Ethiopia, who negotiated with the document that they ended up signing. I did meet with both delegations while they were in Addis, but I can assure you that the United States, while we very much encouraged them to recommit themselves to the cessation of hostilities and to moving forward on transitional arrangements, that the decision to sign was theirs. Now in terms of the elections, I think what we have is a situation where the people of South Sudan really need to have the ability to come together as part of a transitional arrangement. The negotiations that will resume in Addis shortly will have representatives of civil society, religious communities, traditional leaders and others, as well as the government and the SPLN and opposition. So they will be the ones to decide what the transitional arrangement will be, what the transitional government will look like, and what the calendar for the transition will be. The United States does not have a position on when elections should be. We believe that what is needed though is a transitional period that will oversee critical reforms in the country, including the writing of a new constitution, a permanent constitution, and the time that that will take, really will dictate when elections should be held. But the process is one that will be owned by the South Sudanese, will be facilitated by IGAD and IGAD will continue to be supported by the United States and other key international partners of the troika and the European Union, China. The timing of the elections will depend on the process of transition. The South Sudanese need to make the determination.

**MODERATOR:** We have time for one final question. This question was submitted by Carlos Tobias from Fullnews.info in Togo. This is for Ambassador Booth. What is the current relationship between oil and war in South Sudan? What are the other reasons for the conflict?

**SPECIAL ENVOY BOOTH:** That is a very good question. South Sudan as the world's youngest country has a great advantage of having oil resources so it has a revenue stream. Unfortunately, that revenue stream has not been fully reflected in terms of development of the country. The conflict at this point has resulted in a reduction by almost half of oil output from South Sudan, so the entire country, even if not directly involved in the fighting, will suffer for a long time economically as a result of this conflict. What we believe is that the oil resources of the country need to be harnessed and used for development to provide social services, such as health care and education and to begin to develop the infrastructure so that the economy can be diversified. Shortly before the conflict broke out on the 15<sup>th</sup> of December, the government of South Sudan hosted an international investment conference. I was in Juba for that conference. It was truly amazing to see the interest of the international private sector in the world's newest country, finding opportunities to invest there. What the country most needs now is a restoration of peace and a credible transitional process that will put in place the reforms that are needed, including financial management reforms that will ensure that in the future that natural resources of the country, oil in particular, are used for the benefit of the people of South Sudan.