

Dear all

The mandate of the Ethiopian peacekeepers (UNISFA) stationed in Abyei is about to come up for renewal on May 22nd. Unfortunately, it appears **the Ethiopian government want to withdraw the peacekeepers**. The UN Security Council will make a decision on the way forward **this Monday 19th May**.

If they can be persuaded that Sudan and South Sudan are willing to make progress on the issue of Abyei, they may stay longer. However, the Dinka Ngok community have already made numerous compromises and are unlikely to be willing to make further compromises without any hope of a final resolution. It is arguably in the interests of the Sudanese government for the peacekeepers to leave as it will further destabilise the area, so it is not clear why this threat would encourage them to make compromises.

The obvious way forward would be for the UN to implement the AUHIP proposal of September 2012 or accept the Ngok Dinka's implementation of that proposal in last October's community referendum. However, they have shown no signs of willingness to do this.

If the peacekeepers do withdraw, the thousands of civilians who have returned and are living in Abyei will be at risk. **There will be nothing to stop the Government of Sudan doing what they did in May 2011**, and the people who have returned are likely to run away or demand armed protection from their own people.

Over the last few months, the Ethiopian peacekeepers have already been withdrawing protection from some of the Ngok villages north of Abyei town. In some cases they have rounded up civilians and encouraged them to flee south, warning them they will not protect them. As a result, many of those who returned to their villages for the referendum (and stayed for several months) have gone back to Agok on the edge of Abyei area, or even further south. A few Ngok people still remain in Noong and Dungop (northern villages), and many more in Marial Achaak, Rumamer (eastern villages on the Misseriya migration route) and Abyei town itself. It is disappointing that a force supposed to protect returnees have effectively displaced returnees who had successfully resumed their way of life, rebuilding their homes and beginning to cultivate again.

Please pray:

That UNISFA would stay

That UNISFA would regain the passion they had at first in 2011 for protecting and assisting returnees

For protection and courage for returnees

That the UN Security Council would see the seriousness of the situation and find a way of making progress without UNISFA withdrawing

For the withdrawal of the Sudanese Armed Forces from Kec

That when the South Sudan Legislative Assembly reconvenes, it would endorse the results of the Oct 2013 Abyei Community Referendum

For wider reconciliation within South Sudan

Please also pray for Fr Biong Kuol, who has not been well recently, and give thanks for ECS Pr Zachariah Dau's marriage. Hannah and I get married in two weeks on May 31st, so we would also appreciate your prayers that God would be glorified in our wedding and marriage and that others would know Christ because of our unity.

Love & solidarity

Tim