

Addis Ababa Agreements: The shaky path to peace

PAX, Nico Plooijer, 29 January 2014

On 23 January the Government of the Republic of South Sudan (GoRSS) and SPLM/A-Opposition signed the Ceasefire and Detainees Agreements in Addis Ababa. PAX welcomes this as an important step with regards to protecting civilians from further violence, and as a first opening towards negotiations which should address the underlying causes of the recent conflict. At the same time though, there's need for caution.

The agreements

The agreements reached between the warring parties form the necessary first step on a long path that will hopefully lead to more sustainable peace and stability. However, it is a pretty shaky first step. First of all, because it is questionable how comprehensive and sustainable the cease-fire will be. Both parties have already accused each other of breaches and it is reported that fights continue in many parts of the country, especially in the Jonglei, Unity and Upper Nile states. Numerous warring factions feel unrepresented in the talks or might not be under any command at all and, at the same time, the government is adding fuel to the fire by recruiting an additional 50,000 soldiers and by charging oppositional leaders of treason .

If fighting indeed continues, it jeopardizes further talks that are scheduled to take place in about a week from now. A decision on the release of the political detainees, who are recognized by both parties to play a significant role in the “ongoing dialogue of South Sudan”, is still pending with President Kiir. Protection of Civilians features prominently in the ceasefire agreement, but it is defined rather narrowly as refraining from violent acts towards civilians and, unfortunately, even this has up to now proven to be difficult. The much needed Monitoring and Verification Mission has not been put up yet and it is unclear how it can be developed on such short term.

Secondly, PAX, as well as several South Sudanese Civil Society organizations have questioned the exclusivity of ‘Addis’ negotiations. The process only included the elites from the SPLM-factions that caused the conflict in the first place. While the direct cause for the current conflict were political disagreements within the SPLM , the underlying causes concern the wider society. Since SPLM-politics are so closely related to SPLA military solutions, a partial settlement will undoubtedly lead to further violence and instability on the longer term. Also, while the agreements refer to national healing and dialogue processes, the translation of these processes focuses primarily on the political level. In order to avoid the mistakes of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), where only the two warring sides determined the faith of the nation, the next round of negotiations has to be inclusive, involving a broad representation of South Sudanese civilians, including women, youth and the Churches.

As has been voiced by others¹ one of the critical failures since 2005 has been the focus on technical state and institution building, without much attention for true democratization, security reform and bottom-up nation building. This has left the South Sudanese society fractured, with crimes unaccounted for, and wounds unhealed.

¹ Helen Clarke/UNDP, Jok Madut/Sudd

The core components of an extensive and inclusive peace process and a strategy for non-recurrence of violence should be the following:

1. *An Inclusive national [political] dialogue and constitutional review process*

In order to develop a process of nation building that does address the root causes of the conflict in South Sudan a broad range of civil society, state and local actors should be invited to participate. The now stalled Constitutional review process could and should provide an excellent platform to create a more solid democratic foundation and guarantees for upholding basic rights in South Sudan. Before the fighting started, the EU Commission has announced its support for Civil Society organizations that tried to participate in this process. We call upon the EU and other international actors to renew their commitment to this process as soon as possible. Because GoRSS has not demonstrated any commitment to Constitution making we urge them to fulfill its obligations and establish a mechanism to ensure that the process is participatory, inclusive and democratic.

2. *Protection of Civilians and Security Reform*

A major reform of the SPLA is needed as a starting point for adequate efforts in trust and confidence building between and among communities and security forces. This process will be complicated by the fact that the suffering of the people of South Sudan has been enormous. Reports of atrocities by both the SPLA and opposition forces are numerous. Therefore, the AU, UNMISS and other relevant actors must a.s.a.p. begin to independently investigate human rights abuses. Also GoRSS needs to ensure strict accountability of the security forces to address misconduct in their interactions with communities. In order to align Protection of Civilian actions more with civilian needs, both GoRSS and UNMISS should redefine PoC strategies based on consulting the people that directly need protection. This can inform which priorities can and should be addressed, what civilians can and should expect from GoRSS and UNMISS, and how civilians can contribute to security promotion.

3. *Dialogue and the long path to reconciliation, truth and justice*

Obviously, the only priority on the ground – in towns, villages, IDP camps - is crisis management and prevention of further localized conflicts. On the ground several initiatives of local partners of PAX are continuing, working around the clock to prevent conflict within and between their communities, and pave the way for a solid and sustainable democracy.² These activities contribute to the foundation on which South Sudanese society can be rebuild, on which the nation can grow and reconciliation can take place. These are the seeds that need to be nourished in order to break the destructive vicious cycle of political and military power play at the top. The legitimacy created by local actors currently involved in conflict management initiatives can be used as a platform for the longer term goals of reconciliation, truth and justice. Reconciliation should not be organized from the top and be poured down over the citizens, but be built from the grassroots up, in close collaboration with churches. It is of the utmost importance to support these activities now.

² These conflict management initiatives include prevention initiatives promoting dialogue, non-violence, ADR processes to resolve disputes and negotiation agreements; monitoring; information sharing, collection and dissemination; enforce compliance with agreements & laws and provisions of justice.

Many may have thought that South Sudan, against all odds, could become a democratic, stable and prosperous country without dealing with the past. They were wrong, as the recent escalation of violence shows. We call upon the international actors to provide long-term support to these local dialogue processes and the local projects aiming at truth-telling, justice and reconciliation.

*For more than 20 years, PAX has been working in Sudan (and now South Sudan). Current programs focus on community security, crisis management, and conflict prevention as well as on political dialogue and the constitutional review process.