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South Sudan's Prospects for Peace and Security

*Excerpts of remarks by U.S. Rep. Chris Smith, Chairman
Hearing of the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health,
Global Human Rights and International Organizations
April 27, 2016*

On July 9, 2011, the Republic of South Sudan became the world's newest nation. In a referendum held in January of that year, nearly 99% of the population voted to become independent from the Republic of the Sudan. Although there were those who felt the South Sudanese were not prepared for independence, the people of that country believed otherwise and rejoiced in severing their ties to the regime in Khartoum after many years of war and efforts to undermine the South.

Unfortunately, the people's rejoicing was short-lived. The lack of infrastructure and transparent governance frustrated any hope of progress for this fledgling nation. Despite having significant arable land, agricultural production did not increase, largely due to the lack of transportation and power infrastructure needed, which also prevented significant mining or manufacturing operations.

Nearly five years after independence, South Sudan remains heavily dependent on its oil production, which represents as much as 98% of its revenue. As the price of oil has fallen worldwide, South Sudan became the producer earning the least from each barrel of oil, estimated to be between \$9-12 a barrel. Although an increase in agriculture could have helped bridge the gap, the displacement of so many farmers, the continuing insecurity and the recent spread of violence to the agricultural heartland prevents any benefits agriculture could have provided.

Consequently, South Sudan is projected to have a negative growth rate this year of nearly -8%. More than 2.4 million people have been displaced by conflict just since December 2013; 706,600 of them are now refugees in neighboring Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda and Kenya. United Nations officials estimate that more than 6 million people need humanitarian aid with nearly a quarter of the country's population – or 2.8 million people – facing life-threatening hunger.

The humanitarian crisis we are trying to address is indeed among the worst in the world today.

Bob Leavitt, Assistant Administrator for USAID, will testify today that, “Half of all Sudanese—6.1 million people—are in need of humanitarian assistance or protection this year” and “Over half of all children aged 6 to 15 —1.8 million children— are not in school in South Sudan, the highest of any proportion in any country.”

Efforts to address the needs of the South Sudanese people have been blocked by various fighting forces. At least 52 relief workers have been killed since the civil war began, and according to the UN, there are numerous reports of harassment, threats and “active hostility” toward aid workers. Apparently, targeted attacks to prevent aid from reaching certain communities have meant that far too many people in need cannot be helped – even in UN compounds, which also have come under attack.

I was scheduled to visit South Sudan on a trip that unfortunately coincided with the eruption of violence in December 2013, and so my trip had to be cancelled. For more than 20 months, fighting between forces led by President Salva Kiir and former Vice President Riek Machar continued without stoppage despite several cease-fire agreements. In fact, the targeting of populations and oil facilities became worse the closer the signing of a final agreement came as both sides competed for territory before agreeing to halt hostilities. Unspeakable human rights violations have occurred, as documented by the African Union Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan and UN reports have corroborated. The inter-ethnic Dinka-Nuer conflict has now devolved into intra-ethnic animosity involving clans within larger ethnic groups. Marcell Wells, of the Center for Civilians in Conflict, includes an interview with Rebecca, a 29-year-old victim who lost her husband.

“The government soldiers came and were looking for Nuers; they killed all the Nuers they found. When the [armed opposition] attacked, they killed the Dinkas and other tribes...Our dead relatives will never come back. But we need to know [those responsible]. Then we can decide to forgive them or send them to prison. I want to know why they killed innocent civilians, why did they kill our children...The government must recognize our suffering [and] rebuild our homes. Once [our homes are rebuilt], our children [are back in] school, we have medicine, and the guns have stopped banging in my head, I will have [what I need].”

And let us be honest in stating that neither President Kiir nor returning Vice President Machar controls all the forces still in the field. The merging of militias into the national army has produced units more loyal to their commanders than to the government. Meanwhile, Machar’s hastily assembled rebellion also lacks strict chain of command. Therefore, achieving a lasting end to the fighting will take more than a peace accord signed by these two men.

The United States played a major role in ending the South’s long and destructive war with Sudan and was instrumental in its independence. Since then, the US. Government has been the leading donor, contributing approximately \$1.5 billion in humanitarian aid.

Today’s hearing will examine the role the United States has played and continues to play in search of peace, stability and prosperity in South Sudan. Our State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development witnesses will describe the successes and failures in this

nearly five-year effort. Our private panel will discuss the roadblocks to peace, democracy and governance in South Sudan.

Witnesses on both panels hopefully will explain how the optimism of 2011 has devolved to the barbarism we are trying to overcome today. South Sudan teeters on the brink of being a failed state. It is our job to see what can be done to forestall such a conclusion to what was hoped would be a bright future.

At this point, however, we must be clear with all factions of the Government of South Sudan and the various militias still in the field that enough is enough. Any continued fighting must end now. There must be accountability for the war crimes and atrocities that have occurred, and the transitional government must commit itself to contributing all it can to help its own people and not depend solely on the aid from the international community.

Those of us who want to help the people of South Sudan should continue to do so, but that country's government must stop making those efforts more difficult and life unbearable for the many citizens of that country.