

Abyei Aflame: An Update from the Field

May 30, 2008

TODAY IN ABYEI

The key to a comprehensive peace in Sudan hinges upon Abyei, the volatile and oil rich area astride the boundary between North and South Sudan. Five weeks after ENOUGH issued its report “Sound-ing the Alarm on Abyei,” the town of Abyei has ceased to exist. The 31st Brigade of the Sudanese Armed Forces, or SAF, has displaced the entire civilian population and burned Abyei to the ground. SPLM officials have estimated that 106,500 have been displaced. Abyei is recognized by most Sudan experts as a uniquely important bellwether of war or peace between Khartoum and Sudan’s South. There is still time to prevent a return to full-scale war throughout the entire country. The Bush Administration must step up and make sure the international community is doing all it can to bring peace to all of Sudan.

KEY TERMS

Brigade 31—This SAF brigade has been operating illegally in the Abyei area for months, terrorizing and systematically clearing the population from Abyei town.

SAF—The Sudan Armed Forces is the national army of Sudan, but since 1989 it has effectively become the military arm of the ruling National Congress Party in Khartoum.

SPLA—the military arm of the Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement.

HOW COULD THIS HAVE HAPPENED?

The ultimate cause of the most recent violence is the failure of the National Congress Party to implement the Abyei Protocol.

The main reason Khartoum is getting away with this strategy is that the United States, which wrote the Abyei Protocol, has shown little interest or understanding of the issues or commitment to engaging in any approach except for appeasement.

THE “NORMALIZATION” INITIATIVE

The U.S. is now engaged in a process that has become known as “normalization” talks with Sudan. The U.S. initially stated that normalization would end if there was new violence in Sudan, particularly in Abyei. Normalization talks are scheduled to resume in Khartoum on May 30. Given the absence of





Source: Map adapted from United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations Cartographic Section, Map No. 3707 Rev. 10. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

URGENT STEPS NEEDED IN THE SHORT RUN?

The Administration should cancel further normalization talks until: Khartoum removes the 31st Brigade and other illegal Khartoum-affiliated military from the region; accedes to the interim boundaries and an interim administration stipulated in the Abyei Protocol; and agrees to pay the costs of returning the displaced to their now destroyed homes.

The U.S. Congress should specifically increase its oversight of Administration actions with regard to Sudan in this period leading up to Administration transition.

The U.N. Security Council should ensure that the United Nations peacekeeping presence in Abyei is reinforced with a permanent U.N. presence to monitor and report on the situation and promote local reconciliation.

a public U.S. government response to the violence and displacement in Abyei and the failure to make any effort to prevent these events, renewed talks are deeply worrisome. U.S. government failure to follow through on Abyei has major implications for the prospects of CPA fulfillment and a possible return to war.

Activists need to be alert to the full spectrum of U.S. government activities on all of Sudan. We cannot have a narrow outlook. Abyei should matter to all who care about peace and democratic transition in Sudan. For there to be a solution in Darfur, there must be full implementation of the CPA. For the CPA to bring peace to Sudan, the crisis in Darfur must be addressed.