

THE STATEMENT

H.E. Gen. Salva Kiir Mayardit

President of the Republic of South Sudan



To the National Legislature

23rd April 2013

Statement of
H.E. President General Salva Kiir Mayardit
Opening of the South Sudan
National Legislature
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Rt. Honourable Speaker of the National Legislature,
Honourable Members of the Executive
Honourable Members of this August House,
Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Invited Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to start with an African proverb:

“A boat doesn’t move forward if everybody peddles in their own way.”

I extend to you my warmest greetings on the opening of the first session of 2013 of the South Sudan National Legislature and I urge you to reflect on this proverb as you begin this session. *Now, more than ever, it is critical that we move forward together with one vision for South Sudan.*

I hope that, during the recess, you the Members of this august house have all spent productive time in your constituencies, and have returned to this House full of insights into the wishes and hopes of your constituent communities.

Our people depend on you as the bridge between them and development and it is important that you work hard to fulfil these great expectations upon you.

Rt. Honourable Speaker and Honourable Members:

You last left this House during difficult times. Under austerity measures, your incomes and those of your constituents were severely cut back.

Government projects were on hold in support of a national imperative--the shut-down of our oil production. We were forced to take this action in order to protect the wealth beneath our lands, so that our children and grandchildren can benefit from these God-given riches.

We were also facing crisis in Jonglei State where David Yau Yau rebel activity was devastating our largest state and affecting other states as well. While we continue to make strides in containing the situation, rebels continue to create serious instability.

Most recently, we were shocked by the killing of UNMISS peacekeepers and civilian personnel by this group. To the families of these unfortunate victims, who left their far-away homes to come and help us here, I say this:

Your loved ones gave their lives in the noble cause of defending the weak and powerless against ruthless and heartless criminals. This is unacceptable. I will not permit such people to continue their reign of terror against innocent and law-abiding people.

We will work to secure justice for all your loved ones, and all the other innocents who have been so ruthlessly slaughtered in pursuit of personal gain. As UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon stated on the 9th of April, the killing of Peacekeepers is a war crime and this falls under the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court. We will pursue the criminals and justice will prevail.

Rt. Honourable Speaker and Honourable Members:

Despite these huge challenges, we have demonstrated resilience and continued our revolutionary spirit. Indeed, we have achieved major breakthroughs.

I must commend the efforts of our negotiating team, who persevered on behalf of all South Sudanese in difficult negotiations with Sudan. As a result of their efforts, on the 8th of March we reached agreement on a document known as the Implementation Matrix, which contains 68 points.

To demonstrate that both parties are committed to the full implementation of the Matrix, we successfully hosted the first visit of His Excellency President Bashir of the Republic of Sudan to Juba. He and I had fruitful discussions regarding the way forward for normalizing our relations.

We were able to engage in technical discussions with the relevant persons among his delegation with regards to the Implementation Matrix. On our part, we will continue to work diligently towards implementing all 68 points and we expect our partners to do likewise. Meanwhile, I would like to highlight the three most urgent points.

The first of these is the agreement to implement the Security Arrangements Agreement of September 2012. This called for the withdrawal of all troops from a 10-mile wide safe demilitarized zone, along our border with the Republic of Sudan.

I confirm that we are fully in compliance, and all SPLA personnel have been deployed away from the demilitarized zone. We now expect rapid progress on the resolution of the disputed areas along our border with the Republic of Sudan.

We also insist that the international forces responsible for patrolling the demilitarized zone must be transparent in their reporting of any and all infringements of the zone, including aerial bombardments of our territory by the Sudan Air Force. We have a right to a safe and defined border with Sudan, and this is a key step towards achieving that goal.

On Abyei, while we have yet to reach agreement on the formation of the Council due to differences in percentages, we have agreed that the Administration should be formed. President Bashir also agreed to pay arrears of profit earned from oil originating from Abyei.

We also agreed that borders must be opened and organized so as to improve trade and movement between the two countries.

The third point I will address here, is the agreement to resume production from our sovereign oil fields. Last year, when we took the difficult decision to suspend oil production, I was overwhelmed by the level of approval from the people of South Sudan.

You understood the reasons behind the decision. We are custodians of our resources for the generations to come, and if those resources are being stolen, you agreed that it was better that they remain in the ground.

You reminded me that we survived for hundreds of years without oil income, and that we would survive the suspension of that income.

Indeed today, the people of South Sudan have demonstrated our revolutionary spirit. I was impressed by the spirit of our people then, and I remain in awe of that spirit as they have faced the hard challenges of austerity. I am proud of the dignity displayed by the South Sudanese people in these difficult times.

Rt. Honourable Speaker and Members of this august house:

Many people are wondering what will happen now that the first oil is reaching Port Sudan and the income will begin to come to us. This is not the time to deal with this in great detail, but let me make the following points:

It is not possible to lose 98% of the national income, for an extended time, without a price.

It is not possible to leave austerity behind straight away. We must pay our dues. We have incurred debts to those who kept us afloat and enabled us to keep core services running. We must repay those debts as a matter of honour and urgency. This is a priority.

Our next budget will retain many elements of austerity and we must keep our belts tight until the end of the year. There will be a gradual and systematic return to pre- shutdown budget levels. The priorities of the budget that will come to you will reflect an increase in infrastructure development, agriculture, livestock and fisheries and vital services in education and health.

In this respect, our citizens should already be noticing certain improvements. The South Sudan Pound is strengthening against the dollar. I expect this trend to continue, as the effects of oil income are felt.

Hopefully, the Central Bank and black market values of our currency will soon be equal, or close to it. This will discourage those who have become used to exploiting the gap in order to profit from FOREX deals. It will make it easier to exchange your money when necessary and discourage the shameful sight of people sleeping all night outside FOREX bureaus in Juba Town.

It is better for our people to enjoy the benefits of a strong currency, backed by genuine wealth, than to gamble on a weak currency, and thus further weaken it.

Rt. Honourable Speaker and Honourable Members:

To the many from the international community who predicted disaster when we closed our oil fields—I want to offer my sincere thanks for your continued support of South Sudan, despite your concerns. You voiced your concerns while continuing to work with us to overcome the impasse we had with Sudan.

We are very much aware of the debt we owe the international community in assisting our new country to take its first steps as a sovereign independent nation.

We are a sovereign nation and our resources are ours to exploit, or leave in the ground as we see fit. You are all well aware of the hostile actions which led us to suspend our oil production.

I hope that this drastic action has demonstrated to you, and to the Republic of Sudan, that true co-operation in good faith is essential to secure a safe and prosperous future for both nations. Despite the challenges in our relationship with Sudan, I view the progress made as positive and promising.

Rt. Honourable Speaker and Honourable Members:

For those who have feared that a return to war is imminent, rest assured that I remain committed not to return this country to war. As a career soldier, I truly know the devastation of war, and understand the terrible price which it would exact upon our people. For this reason I will persevere with the implementation of the matrix, regardless of any cost I may pay. This is a point of principle because our people need peace.

I occupy my position as your President, in order to seek the best for all our people, and I say the best cannot be achieved by a return to war.

I will not accept unnecessary shedding of blood on my watch. Let us be as patient as we can. Let us not respond to provocation. Let us not inflame our people to retaliate. Let us seek all possible ways to find peace for our people.

When I refer to our people, I do not think only of those of you among us. As President, I must think also of the small child struggling to go to school. I must think also of the mother, fighting to keep her family well. I must think also of the teachers and nurses, the messengers and tea-ladies, the cattle-herders and fishermen and farmers all working every day to bring food to their families and make a decent life for their children. I must think of all of you, and I truly believe that none of you favour war but rather peace and prosperity.

As we endeavour to achieve true peace and prosperity, we must learn to reconcile our differences for the betterment of our nation. I believe that a process to address reconciliation is indeed imperative for this country.

We must work to heal the wounds created during our long struggle for independence and equality. We must work together to build a nation worthy of the sacrifice of our many martyrs and innocent victims. As President, this is one of my priorities for this young nation.

But we must create an inclusive and people driven process in order to achieve true reconciliation.

Rt. Honourable Speaker and Honourable Members,

I am happy to say that we have continued to work to improve and build upon our relations within the international community, both bilateral and multilateral. I would like to announce that we have agreed on a major loan scheme with the People's Republic of China.

These loans are to pay for major infrastructure projects. This includes the completion of Juba International Airport, which has remained half-built for too long. Our current airport has outgrown its capacity and we need a new airport building that will accommodate the huge air traffic in and out of South Sudan.

We will also begin construction of key roads to connect us to neighbouring countries and also improve our interstate connectivity. Road infrastructure will improve communications and reduce internal transportation costs, thus reducing the cost of goods.

We will work to construct major electricity schemes which will provide rapid improvements in both the standard of living for our people, and the ease and expense of doing business in South Sudan. Electricity will also encourage industrialization.

These are crucial schemes. Without such improvements in communications and power supply, we will not be able to provide the fast development which our people demand, and so richly deserve.

The second development I wish to highlight is the positive outcome of the South Sudan Economic Partners Forum, hosted by the US State Department on April 16th and 17th in Washington DC. The forum marked the start of an enhanced partnership to strengthen governance, political inclusiveness and sustainable development in South Sudan. We are in agreement that a thriving private sector is critical to job creation, improved livelihoods and economic growth.

One major outcome is that international partners will support South Sudan to organize a Private Sector Investment Conference in Juba later this year.

The international private sector is most welcome to come and share in the fruits of our rapid development, and we look forward to learning from them, through effective skills transfer to our own people.

Rt. Honourable Speaker and Honourable Members:

I wish to bring to your attention that elsewhere in the world; there have been some worrying developments, which we are observing closely. Two of our neighbouring nations are experiencing serious challenges, which could potentially affect our own security.

I note with concern the recent coup in Central African Republic, and the continuing insecurity in certain areas of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Both of these situations could spill over into our territory.

We are already hosting a large number of refugees from DRC. As a people who have long experience of exile as a result of conflict, we naturally feel great sympathy for those who are similarly affected. However, rest assured that we are keeping a close watch, to ensure that no conflict is allowed to cross our border, and that none of the combatants are permitted to gather in our lands and use it as a point of launching attacks to our neighbours.

The recent coup in the Central African Republic is of great concern. We are aware of a genuine threat to our own security, originating from CAR. So far, the precise affiliations of the new regime are unknown and as such it must be viewed with a prudent level of suspicion.

Because of this, we have deployed troops to patrol our common border and to ensure the security of our people living near that border.

Rt. Honourable Speaker and Honourable Members,

Let me briefly outline for you what I expect from this August House in the year to come. First, there are laws and Acts awaiting passage. Some have waited for far too long. This is a key part of your work as legislators, and the nation is depending on your best efforts. I particularly look forward to receiving:

1. The Petroleum Revenue Management Bill
2. The Agricultural Bank Bill
3. The Workers Trade Union Bill
4. The Right to Access of Information Bill
5. The Broadcasting Corporation Bill
6. The Media Authority Bill
7. The Advocacy Bill
8. The Pension Scheme Bill and
9. The HIV/AIDS Commission Bill

Secondly, I expect you to pay close attention to education. This remains a key priority for South Sudan.

Without well-educated young men and women, we will continue to rely on foreigners to bring us development. This is not why we fought so long for the freedom to control our own destiny.

We must prepare the coming generations to take full control of our affairs, and I expect you to do your part in this, by supporting legislation which advances education for all girls and boys.

Thirdly, I urge you to address the many issues around immigration. We are a country with long land borders. Since the end of our war, we have experienced massive inward immigration from all over the region. Some of this immigration is essential to our development as we badly need people with strong technical skills and experience to fill the gaps in our own workforce.

However, it is clear that most of this migration is by unskilled economic migrants. The Minister of Justice will present you a Labour Bill that will help control such immigration. We do not need foreigners to work as housekeepers, washerwomen, drivers, gardeners and shopkeepers. These jobs should be filled by our own people, who badly need work.

We also do not need to play host to criminals and people of ill repute, who unfortunately flooded in along with the many genuine and honest job-seekers. I expect this House to address this issue in the coming year.

Fourthly, and this is related to the previous priority, we need to address our high rate of unemployment. We must create jobs for our people. By this I do not mean expanding the governmental sector, or creating artificial jobs through unnecessary projects.

What I mean, primarily, is an expansion of the private sector. The private sector will be the engine of our development, and it needs to be managed by ourselves, creating real jobs for our people.

Foreign firms, international organizations and NGOs must be obliged to employ South Sudanese in all jobs which do not require specialist skills that our workforce cannot supply. Our own private sector must be supported to expand and compete.

We need to support vocational education alongside academic education. We need to ensure that we are creating an enabling environment for business start-ups.

We need to support the availability of loan finances for our indigenous businesses. I expect you as Legislators to support such measures.

Rt. Honourable Speaker and Honourable Members:

Let me end this list by saying the following. The oil may be flowing, but this will not be a parliamentary session of big spending and extravagance. Instead, this will be the session which determines how we can better manage our income as it gradually trickles into our accounts.

Therefore the Minister of Justice will soon bring to you the Financial Management Bill, Public Procurement and Disposal Bill and Custom Service Bill. These bills will address the problem of how best to use our resources to provide improvements in services to every County in our nation.

It may be that some of the austerity measures are in fact positive, and should be continued. If this is the case I hope you will point out those improvements we should make. You will carry a heavy responsibility on your shoulders this coming year, but we will look back on this session as the one which set our economy on a new and more sustainable course.

Finally, I have been generally encouraged by the performance of this august house as you have worked diligently to pass bills that will move this nation forward.

As you begin this next session with renewed hope, I am confident that great progress will be made. Your constituents and fellow citizens are depending on you.

With this, I declare that the first session of 2013 is now officially open.

Thank You and God bless you all.