

South Sudan:

Statement on 2024 election preparedness

Introduction

The upcoming elections in South Sudan have generated significant concerns among various stakeholders, including political parties, civil society organisations, and international observers. The primary issues revolve around the contradictions in the electoral process, the lack of essential legal frameworks, and the overall readiness of the country for free and fair elections.

Key issues

1. Contradiction with the Peace Agreement

Article 12.6 of the peace agreement stipulates that elections should only be held after the permanent Constitution has been finalised, passed, and signed by the President. Additionally, the Election Act, as amended, reinforces this requirement. However, the decision by the Election Commission to set an election date has been made without fulfilling these prerequisites, leading to significant backlash from various stakeholders.

2. Lack of consultation with key stakeholders

The recent decision by the Election Commission to set an election date has been met with significant opposition from key stakeholders in South Sudan. A major faction, including the First Vice President, has rejected the election date, arguing that the decision was made without proper consultation and before completing the necessary legal and constitutional frameworks. This lack of consultation is seen as a violation of the peace agreement. Other political parties have also expressed their dissatisfaction, calling for an inter-party dialogue to clarify the election process and ensure that all conditions are met before proceeding. The Commission's unilateral decision has raised questions about its independence and impartiality, underscoring the need for an inclusive and credible electoral process.

3. Financial constraints

The Election Commission submitted a budget of \$233 million for conducting the elections, but the government has only committed to funding 15% of this amount. Currently, only \$5 million has been released, which is insufficient to cover the extensive logistical and operational costs of running a nationwide election. This financial shortfall casts doubt on the Commission's ability to effectively manage the electoral process.

4. Security concerns

The security situation in South Sudan remains volatile, with various military wings of political parties yet to be integrated into a single national army. This fragmentation poses a significant risk to the safety and security of the electoral process and participants. Additionally, ongoing community conflicts further complicate the situation, making it challenging to ensure a peaceful election environment.

5. Lack of electoral preparedness

Several critical preparatory steps for the elections have not been completed:

- **Census and constituency delimitation:** A national census has not been conducted, and constituency boundaries have not been adequately defined. This is essential for determining the number of constituencies and ensuring fair representation.
- **Registration of political parties:** Many political parties have not registered due to restrictive conditions, such as the prohibition of military wings, which many parties still maintain. The registration deadline has passed, further complicating the political landscape.

Civil society's perspective

Civil society organisations have raised serious concerns about the ongoing state of the electoral preparation, highlighting the risk of renewed conflict if the elections are held under the current conditions. The prevailing sentiment is that the **elections should only be undertaken when all necessary legal, logistical, and security measures are in place** to ensure a free, fair, and credible process.

Conclusion

The decision to set an election date in South Sudan has highlighted numerous issues that need urgent attention. The contradictions with the peace agreement, lack of consultation, financial constraints, security concerns, and incomplete electoral preparations collectively threaten the credibility and feasibility of the upcoming elections. It is imperative for all stakeholders to engage in meaningful dialogue and address these issues comprehensively to avoid plunging the country back into conflict. The focus should be on ensuring that the elections are conducted in a manner that upholds the principles of democracy, peace, and stability in South Sudan.