

# **South Sudan National Dialogue**

## **Concept Note**

**December 2016**

In my capacity as the President of the Republic, I feel a great responsibility to protect and preserve the unity of the people of South Sudan and end their suffering. In fulfillment of this responsibility, I am initiating the process of national dialogue. As you are aware, our country descended into political crisis in 2013, following an attempt by some senior members of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) to seize power militarily, a move that was a total contradiction to our constitution and liberation ideals. The political crisis was immediately followed by an extreme violence that shook the foundation of our young republic. As a result of these developments, our country is deeply divided and the continuing conflict is threatening to tear it apart. As your President, I bear the greatest responsibility to unite our people. National unity is the ultimate means through which we can preserve, protect and restore the integrity of our country. National unity is a function of dialogue and consensus.

In pursuit of national unity and reconciliation, my government has undertaken many efforts in an attempt to bring the conflict to a stop and to create a favorable environment to reconstitute national consensus. These efforts resulted in the Intra-SPLM Arusha Agreement and the Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (ARCISS). While these agreements have to a larger extent addressed many political issues, there remain fundamental issues that require a much broader forum. Both the Arusha Agreement and the ARCISS have narrowly addressed power and military nexus of the conflict, the next stage requires the participation of a broader South Sudanese polity in order to fully restore peace and tranquility in the country. All these have compelled me to initiate the process of national dialogue.

## **National Dialogue**

National Dialogue is both a forum and a process through which the people of South Sudan shall gather to redefine the basis of their unity as it relates to nationhood, redefine citizenship and belonging, restructure the state and renegotiate social contract and revitalize their aspirations for development and membership in the world of nations. In my view, a successful national dialogue can only be realized if and when all the people of South Sudan have broadly participated, agreed, and accepted its agenda and outcomes. For this to be realized the process of national dialogue must be seen as credible, genuine and open to all the people of South Sudan and it should have reliable guarantees for its outcomes to be accepted and implemented. For the process to be credible, I am throwing the full weight of the government behind it, but the government will not lead or control the process. The government strongly believes in a South Sudanese led process and so we will identify persons of consensus who have a stature and integrity to steer the process. My government will guarantee safety and freedom of the actors who shall participate in the national dialogue, including those who are currently out of the country, some of whom are opposed to the current government.

In order for the government to throw its weight behind the National Dialogue, it is important that there is an acceptable agenda and a set of parameters to guide this national process. One of the parameters is for all the stakeholders to accept the fact that the national dialogue is situated within the framework of the Peace Agreement (ARCISS). Doing this is certainly critical, as it would ensure that the proceedings of the national dialogue would not contravene the terms of the agreement. However, the proceedings should augment and enrich the agreement. This is important because without the peace agreement the national dialogue would be chaotic.

## **Objectives of the National Dialogue**

The broader objectives of the national dialogue are to end all violent conflicts in South Sudan, constitute national consensus, and save the country from disintegration and foreign interference. To achieve the aforementioned overarching objectives, the following are the specific objectives:

1. To end political and communal violence in the country and resolve how to properly transform the military
2. To redefine and re-establish stronger national unity (including redefining citizenship, belonging, residency and political participation).
3. To restructure the state and negotiate social contract between the citizens and their government (address the nature of federalism tackle the arising conflicts over land, viability, belonging and border, federation of political decisions affecting party structures)
4. To settle issues of diversity (deal with fear of political domination, address issues of the national army, civil service, foreign service).
5. To resolve issues related to resources sharing and allocation (these include land ownership and management, communal and states land disputes, oil, gas, mineral, and taxes)
6. To settle social disputes and sources of conflict (cattle raiding and rustling, child abduction, communal violence related to marriages, territory, murder and other, cattle and human migration related matters).
7. To set a stage for an integrated and inclusive national development strategy.
8. To agree on steps and guarantees to ensure safe, fair, free and peaceful elections and transition in 2018.
9. Agree on a strategy to return internally displaced persons and refugees to their homes.

10.To develop a framework for national peace, healing and reconciliation.

### **Steps Leading to National Dialogue**

In order to ensure the integrity of the National Dialogue process it should follow specific steps to ensure its credibility, acceptability, and robustness of its outcome. The following steps should lead to the National Dialogue:

1. Following passage by the National Council of Ministers, I will officially launch the start of the National dialogue.
2. As your President, I will personally be the patron of the national dialogue.
3. A national committee of eminent personalities and persons of consensus will be constituted to lead the process of national dialogue.
4. The committee is tasked primarily with developing the agenda for national dialogue and facilitating the process.
5. The committee will have a liberty to invite experts and eminent persons internationally to help in the facilitation of the process with a secretariat made up of the three nationally based think tanks (The Sudd Institute, Ebony Center, and the Center for Peace and Development at the University of Juba) and the Council of Churches.
6. The stakeholders will be identified both within and outside the country and once the list of the stakeholders is established, the committee shall share the agenda for national dialogue and stakeholders are given a time frame when they should respond to the agenda.
7. Once the agenda for national dialogue is accepted, the next natural step is to issue a schedule or a timetable for the process, which will be a series of activities at the grassroots and in the regions that would culminate with a national conference to be held in Juba.

## **Stages of the National Dialogue**

The National Dialogue shall undergo three different stages. The first phase shall largely deal with grassroots consultations. The broader aim of these consultations would be to map out grievances that are unique to each community and ones that are encompassing in order to deal with these issues at an appropriate level.

The second step is to convene regional peace conferences. These regional peace conferences shall bring communities in each region together to discuss and resolve outstanding inter-communal conflicts and pass resolutions that shall be forwarded to the national conference as necessary. The objective of these conferences is to initiate dialogue at the grassroots level, particularly among the bordering communities, which certainly have unique and localized disputes that should to be resolved at that level. In each conference, major issues shall be identified, discussed, and resolved and those resolutions shall be adopted by states and matters that pertain to the competences of the national government are forwarded to the national conference.

The third and final stage is convening the national conference. The national conference shall tackle remaining issues that are not addressed in the sub-national processes, which would have direct bearing on national cohesion. This last stage should deal with the adoption of resolutions reached thereof, and disseminating of the same at different sub-national levels as deemed necessary. Equally, at the national level, some resolutions should be forwarded to different processes such as constitutional conference, peace, healing and reconciliation, etc. for consideration and inclusion therein.



Figure 1. A chart showing the flow of the National Dialogue process across different stages.

### **Conclusion**

Fellow citizens, I want to conclude by calling upon all the stakeholders in the country to fully embrace peace and seize this opportunity to enter dialogue with one another. I strongly believe that doing this will certainly set our great country on the right path, a course that ensures we address our differences in a non-violent manner. Peace is within our reach, but we must accept that the responsibility to restore peace in South Sudan rests with us, the people of South Sudan. We should not despair and we should not give up on our hopes for a better future. Together, we will reclaim the greatness of our country and the unity of its people. May the Almighty God bless the Republic of South Sudan and its people.