



PRESS RELEASE
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Beyond signatures: South Sudan's displaced demand better implementation of agreements

As South Sudanese and international actors evaluate the potential of the recently signed agreement to move the country towards peace, the International Refugee Rights Initiative has released a new report highlighting the views of South Sudanese citizens, both who have remained at home and the displaced, on dialogue and peace agreements. Although the research was carried out prior to the signing of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS), the frustrations of the population with the processes so far highlight the need for both a wider dialogue and more effective implementation and monitoring at this critical moment.

"Although South Sudan's citizens, particularly the displaced, are deeply affected by the conflict, they have little access to the peace process, which they overwhelmingly viewed as driven by the elite," Thijs Van Laer, Director of the Prevention and Resolution of Exile Programme at IRRI said. *"Although high-level agreements can play a critical role in silencing the guns, wider engagement is needed for durable change."*

In the case of South Sudan, ordinary citizens and displaced persons are deeply distrustful of these elite fora, seeing them as a vehicle for personal gain rather than for addressing public concerns. In the words of a woman IRRI interviewed in Wau, *"Our leaders are not after peace but after positions. If you observe carefully, you can see the talks are aimed at who takes which position, while forgetting the suffering of their people, the very people who voted them in office."* The sense that leaders on all sides are simply out for themselves has undermined confidence that they can deliver a solution.

In this context, there have been calls for a broad, inclusive dialogue, with a clearer mandate and conducted in a better security environment than the existing national dialogue process which was widely criticised in IRRI's research. Many believe such an initiative would be crucial to prevent further violence and address the country's many structural problems, beyond the narrow focus on power-sharing.

There was also concern about the implementation and durability of any agreement – a concern borne of bitter experience. There were calls for more commitments by the parties – during talks and after their conclusion – and stronger international engagement to ensure that the parties follow through on their commitments. The regional bloc, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), in particular, was criticised as biased toward the government and "too soft." One internally displaced person recommended that *"this time round, IGAD must learn from experience. They should try to put in place all what it takes to protect the agreement, and those who try to go against it must be punished."*

IRRI also queried people about previous peace agreements. Many regretted the lack of implementation of the 2015 peace deal, blamed on the lack of commitment by the parties and of pressure by regional and international actors, and pointed to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) which ended the North-South civil war as the only agreement that had ever been implemented.



“While the new deal offers a glimmer of hope for the many people affected by the continuous violence, our research has shown that many citizens are skeptical about the implementation of such commitments,” Van Laer said. “Regional actors should put more pressure on the parties to take their signature seriously, and to support a wider dialogue to address deeper issues beyond sharing of the cake.”

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