

Sudan: Khartoum Rejects South Sudan's 'Last' Offer On Oil, Abyei
By All Africa
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Khartoum — Sudanese negotiators on Monday dismissed as "nothing new" what their South Sudanese counterparts have termed as the "last offer" to resolve the two countries' disputes over oil transit fees and the status of Abyei, in the latest setback to talks bound by a UN deadline due to end in nine days.

The new offer was unveiled by South Sudan's chief negotiator Pagan Amum, who said in a press conference held in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa on Monday that Juba told Khartoum it can pay 9.10 US dollars for every barrel of oil that passes through pipelines owned by the China-led Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company (GNPOC), and 7.26 US dollars for every barrel of oil that passes through PetroDar pipelines.

Amum, who described the offer as their "last", said it also includes an annual compensation package of 3.2 billion US dollars to help Sudan cover a budget deficit resulting from the loss of three quarters of its oil production to South Sudan when the latter seceded in July last year.

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The South Sudanese official said Juba would also forgive 4.9 billion US dollars in what it says are overdue oil payments before its independence and for oil Sudan confiscated after independence. Sudan says it took the oil in lieu of unpaid transit fees.

The offer also includes a new proposal to hold a referendum organized by the AU and the UN on the status of Abyei, Amum said.

But Sudan, which previously rejected the south's offer of paying 2.6 billion in financial compensation and insisted on getting 32 US dollars for every barrel of oil, swiftly rejected the new proposal saying carrying "nothing new", as put by the member of its negotiating delegation Mutrif Sidiq.

Sidiq, who was also addressing a press conference in Addis Ababa, said that the south's offer was nothing but the combination of previous offers in one document.

He added that the fact that South Sudan shifted from direct to AU-mediated talks means that the process is now back to the starting point.

South Sudan suspended direct talks with Sudan on Saturday citing an airstrike carried out the day before by the Sudanese army inside southern territories. Khartoum denied the charge saying it only bombed forces of the Darfur rebel Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) after they crossed into Sudanese territories coming from South Sudan.

Sidiq said that the direct negotiations were addressing all issues in one package as dictated by the "strategic approach" the two sides adopted in earlier rounds. He also commented on Abyei proposal saying it is an attempt on the part of Juba to refer the dispute to the international community.

The renewed impasse comes nine days before the expiry of a deadline set by the UN Security Council (UNSC)'s resolution number 2046, which threatened non-military sanctions against both sides if they fail to meet the deadline.

Local press reports in Khartoum said on Monday that Khartoum and Juba appear to be headed towards filing a joint démarche requesting the UNSC to extend the deadline.

However, Sidiq appeared unconcerned by the deadline and insisted that border security issues and the establishment of a demilitarized zone remain on top of Khartoum's priorities.

"The end of the deadline does not mean that the two sides should stop negotiating but it means that they now have to show greater seriousness in negotiating a number of contentious issues including cessation of hostilities, withdrawal from occupied areas and ending of support to rebel groups," Sidiq said.

Khartoum accuses Juba of supporting a number of Sudanese rebel groups including JEM of Darfur and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement North (SPLM-N), a former affiliate of South Sudan now fighting the Sudanese government in the border regions of South Kordofan and Blue Nile.

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