

## **Sudan Peace Talks 'Progressing Slowly'**

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African Union-led peace talks between top negotiators from Sudan and South Sudan were said to be progressing slowly Wednesday, despite reports of fresh fighting and questions about Sudan's complete withdrawal from the key oil region of Abyei.

Tensions were high as the second day of negotiations began three hours late. South Sudan's chief negotiator Pagan Amum said the initial discussions were limited to basic procedural issues.

A previous round of talks broke down last month after deadly border clashes took the two sides to the brink of war. The fighting was the worst since the South broke away from Sudan last July after decades of conflict.

Fears of a return to war prompted the U.N. Security Council to pass a resolution, ordering both sides to cease fighting and return to peace talks.

South Sudan pulled its last 700 police officers out from Abyei by last Tuesday's deadline. The United Nations confirmed that Khartoum, too, had withdrawn troops from the disputed region. But diplomatic sources said an unspecified number of Sudanese police remain in Abyei.

South Sudan's chief negotiator demanded U.N. sanctions against Khartoum for multiple violations of the Security Council resolution. But he also said he is ready to continue and described the latest round of talks as "good."

The Sudanese side has declined to speak to reporters and instead issued a statement stressing Khartoum's "commitment to reach a negotiated settlement to all issues of difference," and promising "full adherence to peace and stability."

The two sides are locked in bitter disputes over borders, citizenship and sharing of oil revenues.

Meanwhile, a United Kingdom aid worker who spent 85 days in captivity in Sudan's Darfur region, arrived in Khartoum Wednesday following his release.

The World Food Program said in a statement that Patrick Noonan, who worked for the aid group as a logistician in Nyala in southern Darfur, was a free man after being kidnapped on March 6 by armed men.

The WFP statement said the situation in Darfur remains volatile and that since 2009, 40 humanitarian workers had been abducted there.