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Sudan, South Sudan Set To Resume Negotiations In Late August

by Peter Clotey

A spokesman for the African Union Peace and Security Commission says the group is hopeful South Sudan and Sudan can resolve all outstanding disagreements before a September 22nd deadline.

El-Ghassim Wane said the AU has established a mediation panel to help the two neighboring countries achieve full agreement.

“A number of steps are [being] contemplated. One, of course, is the resumption of talks between the parties, including a summit between President [Omar] Al-Bashir and President Salva Kiir Mayardit, to resolve any outstanding issues,” Wane said. “Our hope is that by the deadline of 22 September, the parties would have reached an agreement on all the outstanding issues.”

Sudan and South Sudan have been unable to resolve disputes over the Abyei region as well as other border and security issues after South Sudan seceded from its northern neighbor, and became an independent country, last year.

On the Abyei region, the two sides disagree over who is eligible to vote in a referendum that will determine the future of the oil-rich area, which both sides claim as their own. Juba and Khartoum also disagree over the exact demarcation of the border they share and have accused each other of supporting rebel groups inside the each other’s territory.

Last week, the African Union announced Sudan and South Sudan had agreed to end a dispute about oil payments. AU mediator and former South African President Thabo Mbeki said Saturday the two parties have reached an agreement on all financial matters regarding oil.

The oil dispute had brought the countries to the brink of war.

South Sudan shut down its oil production entirely in January in the disagreement with Sudan about how much Juba should pay Khartoum to export oil through northern pipelines.

The countries also agreed on ensuring access for humanitarian assistance to the Southern Kordofan and the Blue Nile area following recent conflicts there.

Wane said fighting at the borders appear to have ceased, but adds that disagreements remain, despite the resolution of the oil dispute.

“Equally important is the fact that along their common border, you no longer have fighting, and tension between the two countries has significantly reduced,” he said.

“The parties have not been able to agree on a number of critical issues in their post-cessation relation. And in view of this, the AU Peace and Security Council, has requested a panel to continue its facilitation role to help the parties agree on the outstanding issues, be it Abyei, border, [and] security.”

