

# South Sudan

## *Question*

3 pm

*Asked by Baroness Cox*

**To ask Her Majesty's Government what action they are taking in response to recent developments in South Sudan.**

**7 Jan 2014 : Column 1395**

**The Senior Minister of State, Department for Communities and Local Government & Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Baroness Warsi) (Con):** My Lords, the UK is deeply concerned by the terrible violence in South Sudan that began on 15 December 2013. The UK has supported political talks between representatives of President Kiir and former Vice-President Machar. We have provided additional humanitarian assistance on top of our existing commitments to South Sudan and consular support to British nationals.

**Baroness Cox (CB):** My Lords, I thank the Minister for her comprehensive reply. Does she agree that one of the most disturbing aspects of this tragic situation is Riek Machar's delaying the peace talks, thereby prolonging the fighting that has killed more than 1,000 people and displaced more than 200,000, who are now living in life-threatening conditions; and that he has a disturbing track record of changing allegiance and of brutality, including responsibility for one of the worst massacres of the previous war? Will Her Majesty's Government provide all possible support for the African Union and IGAD to promote a political solution as a matter of urgency and press Riek Machar to join President Salva Kiir's serious commitment to a ceasefire?

**Baroness Warsi:** My Lords, unfortunately, the fighting continues in South Sudan. As we are in the middle of sensitive negotiations on the substantive issues between the two parties, rather than procedural matters, it would be the wrong time to try to attribute blame. It is clear that both sides have a case to answer for the violence that we have seen over the past few weeks. The UK is engaged in encouraging participation in the peace negotiations led by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, which is leading the mediation efforts.

**Lord Chidgey (LD):** My Lords, I think it is generally accepted that the present conflict arises from the power struggle between Riek Machar and Salva Kiir, with scant regard for some 200,000 displaced Sudanese citizens and more than 1000 killed so far, as the noble Baroness pointed out. What is the Government's reaction to the call for urgent additional humanitarian aid, not just bringing forward an existing programme but additional aid to help these people in such a desperate situation? With regard to the negotiations that have begun in Addis Ababa, what discussions are the Government, as a member of the CPA troika, having with like-minded parties: for example, Wang Yi, China's Foreign Minister; Omar al-Bashir, the President of Sudan; and the chair of the AU, Madame Zuma? What discussions are they having with the EU's representatives to the African Union?

**Baroness Warsi:** On the humanitarian question, I assure my noble friend that, as regards the £60 million already allocated to South Sudan, the relevant programmes continue. We have allocated an additional £12.5 million specifically to address the current humanitarian emergency. In terms of the support for the political process, he is, of course, familiar with the troika partners. We, the US and Norway have been involved over a number of years in taking forward work in relation to South Sudan. I assure him that the Foreign Secretary has been in touch with the Sudanese Foreign Minister, the Ugandan Foreign Minister, the Ethiopian Prime Minister, the

Ugandan President and, indeed, with Secretary Kerry on the negotiations. The main challenge was to get representatives of both sides to the table. That has now been achieved. They have met in Addis Ababa from 2 January and, as of today, they have started substantive discussions.

**Lord Triesman (Lab):** My Lords, this is probably one of the most deeply depressing developments experienced by those of us who have spent time in Juba trying to deal with peace, health and food security issues with President Salva Kiir and his original team. The fact that negotiations are taking place in Addis Ababa is, of course, welcome, if the participants take the process seriously. The United Nations Security Council passing a resolution demanding a ceasefire while the negotiations took place would at least indicate the world's abhorrence for this violent outbreak. I do not believe that it would impede the African Union's work at all. Will the United Kingdom and its friends sponsor such a resolution immediately?

**Baroness Warsi:** The Foreign Secretary has issued a number of statements in which he has called for the violence to stop. As the noble Lord is aware, the United Nations Security Council resolution, which I think was passed on Christmas Eve, was specifically intended to ensure that further troops were put on the ground quickly to try to stop the situation deteriorating. They also strengthened the existing UN mission in South Sudan to support its humanitarian work so that the human rights abuses that were occurring were properly documented to ensure that responsibility follows these acts. The negotiations between the representatives of the two parties are ongoing. We have done a huge amount of work in the background but also in leading these negotiations. The Foreign Office's political director, Simon Gass, was there throughout the Christmas period, working with the US and his other counterparts. If it is felt that a further UN Security Council resolution is required over and above the statement issued on 30 December, I will certainly take the noble Lord's views back.

**Lord Alton of Liverpool (CB):** My Lords, in her written reply to me on 3 January, the Minister said that the unanimous adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2132 authorised a significant increase in the number of troops in the UNMISS force in South Sudan. Can she tell us what the numbers actually are and whether she believes that they will be up to the task of dealing with the situation, which, as we have heard, has led to a displacement of 200,000 people? Does she not also agree that there is a real danger that these events in South Sudan will distract the world from looking at what is happening just over the border in Blue Nile, South Kordofan and Darfur, where the campaign of aerial bombardment by Khartoum goes on as we meet?

**Baroness Warsi:** The noble Lord, as always, makes an informed and important point. In relation to the UN Security Council resolution, a further five battalions were committed, which amounts to about 5,500 troops.

Three police units were specifically granted, which amounts to about 480 personnel—those are the increased numbers at this stage. The noble Lord makes an important point about regional challenges, but one of the positive features of this current tragedy is how, for example, Ethiopia, Uganda and even Sudan have acted in a much more responsible way. There has certainly been a suggestion that there could be some joint working between Sudan and South Sudan, maybe in relation to keeping the oil flows going.

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