

Hailemariam Dessalegn

PMI - FDRE

**Your Excellencies Mr. Nihal Deng Nihal and General Taban Deng Gai
Representatives of Both sides,
Your Excellency Mr. Erastus Mwentcha, Deputy Chairperson of the
African Union Commission,
Delegates of Partner countries and organizations,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

First and foremost, I would like, on behalf of IGAD, the Government of the FDRE and of myself, to welcome you all to Addis Ababa on the occasion of the launch of the second phase of negotiations between the two sides in the conflict in South Sudan.

As you all well know, our regional organization IGAD has been making frantic efforts to resolve the crisis in South Sudan since the flare-up of violence that within days transformed into a fully-fledged civil war pitting brothers and comrades against each other. With all too real degeneration of the violence into an all out tribal conflict looming in the horizon, it was only fitting and appropriate that our regional body stepped up to the plate before things spiraled totally out of control. Efforts were made both at the level of leaders and Foreign Ministers to find speedy resolution to the conflict. But equally importantly the Special envoys who were appointed following the resolution of the 23rd Extraordinary Summit of IGAD Heads of State and Government held in Nairobi Kenya on the 27th of December last year in order to bring the parties to the conflict into the negotiating table have been exerting maximum effort to discharge the responsibilities they were entrusted with.

Excellencies

Ladies and gentlemen

I am not going to talk at length about the details of this arduous process as all of you here have been in the thick of it for quite some time now. Suffice it say that after weeks of challenging efforts and shuttling back and forth, the envoys have managed to get the two parties to sign an agreement on the cessation of hostilities and on the question of detainees. While this is a very important step in its own right, the more daunting part of the negotiation process is yet ahead of us and the launch of the second phase today will certainly go a long way in getting us where we ought to be in the pursuit of lasting peace and stability.

At this juncture, it is only appropriate that we all remind ourselves once again that it is time for more, not less, effort; not only to bring the conflict into an immediate end but also to restore confidence and trust among the parties and stakeholders in South Sudan by bringing about a politically sound and viable platform.

That is why your meeting today is going to be extremely vital for the overall success of the peace process. You owe it to your peoples to remain committed to the speedy resolution of this senseless violence that has already claimed the lives of thousands of innocent civilians most of which invariably are women and children and to fully address the various political challenges you face as a party, a government and a people.

But in the meantime, it is an absolute imperative that both Parties respect and expeditiously implement the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement signed on 23rd January 2014, as well as provide all necessary support to ensure the operationalization of the Monitoring and Verification Mechanism as soon as possible.

IGAD and its member countries as well as their regional and international partners will continue to try and bring our pressure to bear on the Parties to urgently address the critical humanitarian crisis, provide protection and assistance, and explore durable solutions to the predicament of refugees and internally displaced persons, in full collaboration and coordination with local and international humanitarian organizations.

Excellencies

Ladies and gentlemen

In order for this to happen, both Parties should not only follow through the launch of this second phase in earnest but, more importantly, do so with strong resolve and commitment. It is my understanding that our Special Envoys have or are in the process of developing a framework for this phase of negotiations, including specific modalities on structure, representation, and timeframe, so as to ensure that dialogue is truly inclusive.

As both sides to the conflict have repeatedly said, the most fundamental issue at the heart of the conflict is of political nature that could only be resolved through civilized dialogue based on the principle of give and take and all-inclusivity. It is my hope and expectation that the peace process will be designed in a such a way that a broad range of South Sudanese stakeholders from government, political parties and civil society actors are brought on board and in manner that gives due respect to the transitional constitutional arrangement already in place in South Sudan.

It is also imperative that we take extra steps to fully address issues that could become source of some concern, whether real or imagined, in good faith. While looking forward to welcoming the recently released detainees to join in the negotiations soon, we should nonetheless quickly embark on the second phase with an open heart and mutual trust. Neither party should however use side issues as an excuse to prevaricate on the negotiation process which could wreak havoc to the overall process. It is my well considered view that you should not unwittingly allow your hard-won independence to wither away and your beloved country to become a hotbed of yet another regionalized proxy conflict with no end in sight.

As leaders of a movement that gave birth to a young nation, you are expected to transcend the petty squabbles and spur of the moment decisions that so often stand in the way of success. Leadership, after all, is about making choices, however hard those might be, in the pursuit of a much larger interest and a more noble goal. No goal, I am sure you will agree with me, could be nobler and no interest more important than saving a young nation and its peace-starved people from falling through the cracks and instead giving them another shot at state building which they so richly deserve. For good measure, by doing so, you will have done not only your people but also our entire region a great service.

**Excellencies Heads of State and Government
Ladies and Gentlemen**

In conclusion, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all our international partners—the UN, AU, the US, UK, EU, Norway and China among others—for their consistent support to the IGAD process that has been coming in all forms and shape and still continues. Your commitment to see this regional effort through has yielded results and it is my humble duty to call on all of you to continue to exert your maximum effort until our brothers in South Sudan fully address their challenges. Together, we will help our brothers and sisters find their way out of the senseless violence they find themselves in. Let me close my remarks by wishing all success to the deliberations.

I thank you !