

South Sudan;s president calls off 2015 elections amid conflict

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USPA News - South Sudanese President Salva Kiir on Monday said the parliamentary and presidential elections next year will not go ahead as scheduled to give warring factions time to reconcile, a risky move that could trigger further instability in the world's newest state. Kiir said the elections would not go ahead even though the transitional constitution requires a new government to be in place no later than July 9, 2015. The president said the period had been "extended" until 2017 or 2018 to reconcile people in the African country, which descended into civil war after violence erupted in December.

"Let us reach an agreement first and after we do that we will pardon the rebels, and after all this we will talk about an interim government," Kiir said. "The interim government will comprise all political parties in South Sudan. All the people in South Sudan will be able to participate." Kiir had already indicated in September that a number of administrative and political problems could delay the 2015 elections, but the National Elections Commission said at the time that it was certain the elections could take place as scheduled. Monday's announcement by Kiir could trigger further instability and resistance from rebels. "When people participate we will have permanent peace in South Sudan. The national unity government will bring all people together," the president said, speaking in Juba, the country's capital. But despite the promise of reconciliation, Kiir also hinted at a possible new disagreement with rebel leader Riek Machar. "Machar wants to become president of the interim government but I am telling him that I was elected to this seat by the people," Kiir said. Kiir also accused forces loyal to Machar of violating a ceasefire pact signed in Ethiopia on Friday, but Machar has accused government forces of doing the same. United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon did not immediately comment on Kiir's announcement, but said it was "disappointing" that Friday's agreement has not been honored. "I am urging the two leaders to abide by their agreement," he said, adding that his representative would continue contacts with both sides to make sure they meet their obligations. The current crisis began on the evening of December 15 with an attack on a meeting of the ruling Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) party and the army headquarters near Juba University. President Salva Kiir attributed the attack to a "failed coup attempt" by soldiers loyal to former Vice President Riek Machar Teny, who was sacked along with the country's entire cabinet in July 2013 in Kiir's apparent struggle to maintain control of the SPLM. Fighting intensified on December 17 and spread to other parts of the country that is prone to ethnic instability, with Kiir being from the Dinka ethnic group and Machar being a Lou Nuer. The International Crisis Group estimates more than 10,000 people have so far been killed in the conflict, which led to the signing of a Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in January, though it was violated almost immediately. South Sudan became the world's newest country when it broke away from Sudan on July 9, 2011, as a culmination of a six-year peace process which began in January 2005 with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). Under the transitional constitution, Kiir's mandate expires on July 9, 2015.

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