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WORLD NEWS | Mon Jun 4, 2012 7:14pm EDT

South Sudan officials have stolen \$4 billion: president



 REUTERS

South Sudan officials have stolen \$4

1

South Sudanese officials have "stolen" an estimated \$4 billion of public money and should return it to salvage the young nation's reputation and help lift its people out of poverty, the president said in a letter seen on Monday.

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The request came as the central African country, which seceded from Sudan less than a year ago, is scrambling for cash to make up for the loss of almost all state revenues with the shutdown of its oil output in January.

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Critics have accused the government of President Salva Kiir doing little to clamp down on widespread corruption that has hampered efforts to build the war-torn state from scratch and jumpstart development.

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In a letter to 75 current and former officials dated May 3, Kiir offered amnesty for officials and individuals with government ties who returned the money.

"An estimated \$4 billion are unaccounted for or, simply put, stolen by former and current officials, as well as corrupt individuals with close ties to government officials," Kiir said in the letter obtained by Reuters.

Reliable figures are hard to come by in South Sudan, but the figure could amount to around one third of the estimated total oil receipts allotted to the South between the 2005 peace deal that ended decades of civil war and independence last year.

"Most of these funds have been taken out of the country and deposited in foreign accounts. Some have purchased properties, often paid in cash," the letter said.

A senior South Sudan government official confirmed to Reuters that the letter was sent to current, former and deputy ministers in the last ten days.

Decades of conflict and economic neglect have left the nation of about 8.6 million people with some of the worst health and education statistics on the planet. Few paved roads exist outside the capital, Juba.

Secession from Sudan last July sparked widespread optimism among South Sudanese that their country would at last head toward prosperity, but lingering disputes with Khartoum and corruption have hobbled the economy since then.

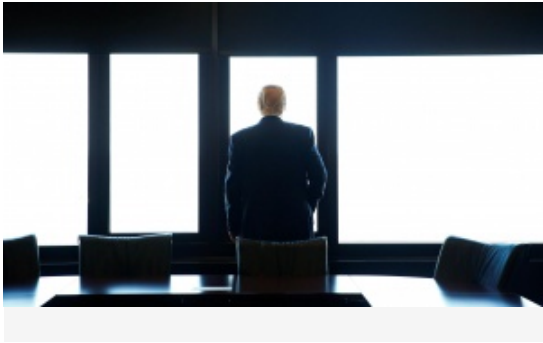
South Sudan's Information Minister Barnaba Marial Benjamin said over half of the estimated \$4 billion was from the country's so-called "durra" scandal, in which a large government purchase of sorghum was allegedly never distributed.

"It is a colossal sum," he said.

"WE FORGOT WHAT WE FOUGHT FOR"

 REUTERS

South Sudan officials have stolen \$4



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