

South Sudan plans to resume oil production in Unity region

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August 19, 2016 (JUBA) - South Sudan has announced it was working to restart oil production in Unity state after more than a year of no operation due to the ongoing conflict in the region.

A newly appointed Petroleum Minister, Ezekiel Lol Gatkuoth, said in a statement broadcast by the state owned South Sudan TV on Thursday - after meeting Chinese ambassador to South Sudan - that President Salva Kiir has instructed the resumption of production of oil from unity and other areas in Upper Nile affected by the conflict.



A Southern Sudanese soldier walks past a crude oil reservoir tank at a field processing facility in Unity State on November 10, 2010. (AFP)

“We have discussed and agreed to resume oil production in unity and other areas in Upper Nile. The president of the republic has given directives. We have also discussed and agreed to review oil contracts with Chinese companies to do exploration and to continue to operate until 2018. The current contracts will be reviewed and extended,” explained minister, a former ally of armed opposition leader and the first vice president, Riek Machar, but who defected because he was not given a national ministry portfolio by Machar.

It was not clear how the oil operations, which was shut down due to conflict, will now resume while the conflict itself has resumed.

The President Salva Kiir removed Machar from his position as first vice president and replaced him with Taban Deng Gai, a move the international community as well as armed opposition leadership, except those loyal to Gai, consider a violation of the peace deal.

Government troops bombarded Machar’s residence in Juba and pursued him with his small number of troops as they fled Juba and beyond.

Leading non-armed opposition figures, including Lam Akol, met and held talks in Nairobi, Kenya, on Thursday with Machar’s senior officials, where they described Machar’s departure from Juba together with several other ministers as a major setback to the agreement.

They called for immediate deployment of protection force and argued that a delay to address the situation may undermine the main element of the power-sharing agreement between SPLM-Juba and SPLM-IO, the main peace partner in the peace deal.

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