

## South Sudan leaders must reflect on their history of struggle for inspiration to bring prosperity to the country

*Lorna Merekaje recently completed the Programme for African Leadership (PfAL) here at LSE. A citizen of South Sudan, she reflects on the first year of independence for the country.*

The independence of South Sudan can best be described as a dream come true! Since February 2011 when the referendum results were officially announced, that nearly 99% voted for secession, every citizen of this soon-to-be new nation was filled with high hopes and expectations. This was a form of liberation that we had never experienced before. Since time immemorial, the people of South Sudan have never had an opportunity to decide their destiny. Indeed, independence brought a sense of dignity and belonging. The notion of a new nation and its sense of unity were strong among the people of South Sudan.



Children rehearsing a dance for South Sudan's independence celebrations a year ago

After 9 July 2011, South Sudan was quickly recognised by many nations. We were granted membership of the United Nations just four days after independence and likewise of the African Union a month later. Although these steps laid a good foundation for the new nation, we have not been spared myriad challenges. The President of the Republic of South Sudan immediately reappointed all 32 ministers of Government of Southern Sudan as caretaker ministers for the Republic of South Sudan including the minister without portfolio!

The appointment of ministers for the Republic of South Sudan was indeed one of the most challenging undertakings of the new nation. It took the Republic of South Sudan almost two months to come up with the final list of ministerial appointments. While the leadership of the country was grappling with, perhaps, finding the right people to appoint to the right job, the citizens, on the other hand, were full of curiosity and desiring a lean and competent team of ministers appointed on merit. This did happen in part, however, a few, whom the people did not trust, made it into the cabinet.

According to the government, 98% of the national budget came from oil revenue. As the governments of Sudan and South Sudan failed to agree on transit fees and terms for use of the oil pipeline, this led to its closure by the South Sudan leader. This has had a negative impact on the economies of both countries, leading them to put in place austerity measures which are affecting everyone.

**Best Way Forward!**

As our national revenue has been drastically reduced, as a citizen of this nation, I expect to see the number of ministries reduced. There is no reason why the Ministry of General Education should be separate from that of Higher Education, Science and Technology. One year after independence, we have not merged the primary school curriculum, let alone other levels of education. Some schools use the Uganda system, others Kenya while some have stuck with the pre-independence curriculum. We would save resources if we had only just one ministry and employed technical personnel from within the country.

Another example is with the Ministry of Roads and Bridges and that of Transport. Personally, I have only seen one highway constructed between Uganda and Juba and that was before independence. I want to know why we provide four-wheel drive vehicles to all 29 ministers, their deputies as well as their families while the nation is going through tough economic times? South Sudan could easily become a success story simply by making a few realistic decisions and taking a firm stand in the fight against corruption. Can someone take the first step and rescue this nation? We have a rich history of struggle and fighting for equality, freedom, justice and prosperity. Can we learn a lesson from our past?

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