



## **Systems for Effective Regional Relations: Ensuring Stability Around the Abyei Area** **Nairobi, Kenya, 15 July—17 July 2009**

This conference was facilitated by Concordis International as part of the Sudan Peace-Building Initiative financed by the European Commission, focusing on conflict mitigation for Sudan's Abyei area. Confidence building and conflict prevention initiatives for Abyei needed to take place in advance of the decision on the demarcation of the Abyei boundary, which is to be announced in mid to end-July of this year by the International Court of Arbitration in the Hague. Both the Abyei Area Administrator and his Deputy were made aware of the planned work and have expressed that it would be a constructive and timely exercise, which could complement their own initiatives to build peace in the area. Concordis engaged in preparations for the event in coordination with the team of the Civil Affairs department of the United Nations Mission In Sudan (UNMIS) on the ground in Abyei, as well as with the Sudanese Government's Presidential Assessment and Evaluation Commission for Southern Kordofan State (PAEC SKS), and the Strategic Advisor for the Three Areas Donor Steering Group. The United States Agency for International Development's Office of Transitional Initiatives (USAID OTI) played a role in supporting the logistical costs associated with the planned initiative.

Concordis brought together 33 influential local leaders and members of civil society from the Dinka Ngok and Misseriya tribes in order to consider possible systems for managing effective, peaceful relationships across the Abyei border. Concordis provided the participants with a space and opportunity to consider not where the border should be, but rather what kind of border and which kind of relationships across that border would enable them to realise their livelihoods and be secure. Presentations were given by a number of consultants sharing different ways of understanding borders and examples of systems for governing border relationships as well as discussing some examples of successful cross-border cooperation initiatives from other contexts. The consultants stressed how borders represent opportunities with the potential both for exacerbating conflict or encouraging peace and development and encouraged the participants to strive to make the best of the opportunity facing Abyei.

Participants were given the opportunity to discuss both their fears and hopes regarding the International Court of Arbitration's upcoming decision about the demarcation of the Abyei boundary. They highlighted a variety of opportunities facing Abyei, and hoped that Abyei could develop into a model region for unity in Sudan. Participants shared how the Misseriyas and the Dinkas lived peacefully together for many centuries and noted the regret they felt concerning the events that have happened in the past. They highlighted how the recommendations that were made after previous conferences were not followed up by the responsible organisations and therefore the suggestion was made to not only come up with recommendations, but also to form alliances in order to make every party sensitive to their role in peaceful coexistence. Two main causes of the issues between the Misseriyas and the Dinkas were identified, namely lack of development, and politicization of the conflict. The necessity of the participation of women in the process toward peaceful coexistence was also stressed, because they have an important role in the local communities.

Overall, participants felt that they had learned much about good border management and the benefits of maintaining cross relations. They hope that what had been discussed during the consultation will play an important part in securing peace in Abyei.

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