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UN Security Council must push for swift resolution of Sudan's post-referendum oil negotiations

With just 96 days left until Sudan's referendum on southern secession, the UN Security Council's visit to the country presents a critical opportunity to focus on the oil sector as an incentive for peace, said Global Witness today.

A delegation from the United Nations Security Council will be in Sudan from today through the end of this week to support efforts for the promotion of peace ahead of the referendum scheduled for January. The south is likely to vote for independence and without intensive diplomatic efforts, this could set the stage for a new war over Sudan's valuable oil reserves. Three quarters of Sudan's oil is in the south. Envoys from Britain, China, France, Russia, the United States, and ten other nations on the Council will make up the delegation. The delegation will be led by the US and UK ambassadors to the UN, Susan Rice and Mark Lyall Grant.

"Security Council members must not waste this chance to push for the acceleration of the post-referendum negotiations on oil," said Dana Wilkins, campaigner at Global Witness. "Given the huge significance of oil revenues to the economies of both the north and south, and the fact that the current oil wealth-sharing agreement has been absolutely critical in keeping the peace for the last five years, brokering a new fair and transparent oil deal will be vital to ensure peace in Sudan after the referendum."

Global Witness welcomes the United Kingdom's recent announcement that Sudan will be a top priority for its presidency of the UN Security Council in November, and calls on it to make oil governance a theme of its presidency. There is no other single issue in Sudan which has such a large impact on whether the country's future is war or peace.

A recent visit by a Sudanese trade delegation to London led to significant concerns among activists that business interests might be prioritized over human rights in the government's diplomatic efforts in Sudan. "It is in the interests of all parties involved, including donors and investors, to ensure that an equitable oil deal is put in place before the referendum takes place," said Wilkins. "Without it, genuine economic and political stability in Sudan will be impossible and a return to war all too inevitable." In the 22 year civil war between north and south Sudan which lasted until 2005, two million people died and four in five southerners had to flee their homes.

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