

Chapter Four

ESSCA-USA Engagement with the United States and South Sudan

Introduction

One of the main goals of ESSCA-USA is advocacy and promotion of crucial issues central to its mission and vision. For instance, the association advocates on issues that Equatorians in Diaspora care about, such as the importance of education; promotion of South Sudanese cultural heritage, health, and wellbeing; rule of law, democracy and people-centered public policies that would improve the lives of South Sudanese, and Equatorians in particular. Indeed, ESSCA-USA engagement with the United States and South Sudan is often influenced primarily by changing events occurring in South Sudan, and less so by things happening in the United States. Civil wars, insecurity, human rights violations, targeted ethnic killings, and atrocities against civilians, particularly in the Equatoria region, discrimination, targeting and intimidation of political leaders from Equatoria, participation of the Diaspora in peace negotiations, and rebuilding efforts, are some of the events and topics that trigger reaction from ESSCA-USA leadership.

This chapter examines ESSCA-USA's interaction with the United States and South Sudan since the founding of the association more than two decades ago. The association stood up to challenge some of the oppressive policies and abusive and discriminatory practices perpetuated by the government of South Sudan against civilians in particular. ESSCA-USA also engaged with the United States administration and American friends of South Sudan to influence the foreign policy of the US towards South Sudan. The chapter is structured as follows: first, it addresses ESSCA-USA engagement with the United States, outlining some of its initiatives and activities intended to influence the US administration's decisions and responses to political situations in South Sudan. Engaging the South Sudan government and South Sudanese communities is the focus of the second part of the chapter. Here, the emphasis is on ESSCA-USA advocacy initiatives on a variety of issues including peace negotiations, constitutional review, South Sudan referendum, justice and accountability, insecurity, the impact of civil war on civilian population, and human rights violations. The association's collaborative



ESSCA-USA Executive Officers, member of the Board of Directors, and officials of US Department of State after a meeting at the US Department of State, January 9, 2015.

efforts with other entities such as the Equatorian Leaders in Diaspora (e.g., in the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Norway, Finland, Sweden, and Egypt), to ensure the realization of just and sustainable peace in South Sudan are also discussed.

ESSCA-USA Engagement with the United States

Despite the fact that ESSCA-USA has been in existence for many years, its engagement with the United States administration as an association only dates back to the recent past. As a result, the analysis herein on the engagement of ESSCA-USA with the United States on issues related to South Sudan is limited in scope and timeframe. As indicated in the introduction, ESSCA-USA's interactions with the United States are often dictated by events occurring in the context of South Sudan's political developments including the preparation for the referendum vote, the review of the draft constitution of South Sudan, eruption of civil war in 2013, peace negotiations, corruption, insecurity, and human rights violations. The main purpose of the engagements is to educate American friends of South Sudan, policy makers and members of congress on the challenges faced by South Sudanese so they can make informed decisions when dealing with foreign policy matters toward South Sudan.

Through writing of press statements, holding meetings with officials in the US Department of State, American friends of South Sudan, and outreach to the South Sudanese communities in the Diaspora and South Sudan, ESSCA-USA was able to influence US government officials and others in their efforts to resolve the conflict in South Sudan. Soon after the outbreak of conflict in December 2013 in capital city Juba, which later spread to other parts of the country, ESSCA-USA fielded numerous inquiries and commentaries from members of the Diaspora about the association's position and what action it should take. Consequently, ESSCA-USA issued a press statement condemning the violence and the loss of lives and urged the parties to the conflict to immediately cease fighting. As it became evident that the situation was becoming a protracted war, ESSCA-USA mobilized the Diaspora to advocate for a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

On January 10-11, 2014, the association convened an emergency conference in Washington DC. The gathering brought together Equatorian Diaspora leaders from the United States, Canada, Europe, and Africa to analyze the root causes of the conflict and explore pathways to end the war, including proposing an



ESSCA-USA Executive Officers Agnes Silvestro, Dr. Jane Kani Edward, Kwaje Lasu, and Esterina N. Bilal, at the Department of State to meet US Special Envoy to Sudan & South Sudan, Ambassador Donald Booth; January 9, 2015.



ESSCA-USA Executive Officers, members of the Board of Directors, and conference attendees, at ESSCA-USA emergency conference in Washington DC, January 11-12, 2014.

alternative vision for South Sudan. The conference attendees, some of whom joined via Skype, identified two major causes of conflict and instability in South Sudan, namely, political, and ethnic problems. While the ethnic problem arises from the domination of the political arena and economic sector of the country by one or two specific ethnic groups the Dinka and the Nuer; the Sudan People Liberation Movement (SPLM) party is also seen as another cause of insecurity and instability in the country.⁵⁵

Following the conclusion of the two-day conference, ESSCA-USA continued to consult with the broader Equatorian Diaspora communities to ensure its position correctly reflected the aspirations of the Diaspora. The outcome of the conference was published in a position paper titled *“South Sudan: The Way forward,”* in February 2014. To end the conflict and chart a hopeful future for South Sudan, the document proposed the following: that, the President of the Republic of South

⁵⁵ ESSCA-USA “South Sudan: The Way Forward,” February 28, 2014, pp 1 - 72



From L to R, Sunday Tabu, Dr. Jane Kani Edward, Josephine Labib, Elonia Masungu, and Oliver Tunds at the ESSCA-USA emergency conference in Washington DC, January 11-12, 2014.

Sudan Salva Kiir Mayardit should step down. The dissolution of the government and its replacement with a new interim government with limited mandate to implement reforms. Some of the short and long term proposed actions included ending the war, initiation of national reconciliation and healing, conduct of census, writing of permanent constitution, reform of the army, and chart a new course for development and nation building.⁵⁶

After its publication, the position paper was shared with the United States members of Congress, Department of State officials, the Troika countries (US, UK, and Norway), the Inter-Governmental Agency for Development (IGAD), the African Union (AU), the government of South Sudan, and the opposition parties. The aim was to inform all stakeholders and decision makers at the peace negotiation held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 2014 of the views of Equatorians in Diaspora. The publication further intended to present an alternative perspective to the international community and South Sudanese leaders as they grappled with finding solutions to the conflict. The document was shared widely with South Sudanese communities in the Diaspora and in South Sudan as well. Additionally, and to ensure the document was understood, and to learn about

⁵⁶ ESSCA-USA “South Sudan: The Way Forward,” February 28, 2014, pages v & vi, pp. 1-72.



Conference attendees at the ESSCA-USA emergency conference in Washington DC, January 11-12, 2014.

possible US government's role and policy toward resolving the conflict in South Sudan, some of ESSCA-USA Executive and Board of Directors members visited the US Department of State to explain the association's position on the crisis in South Sudan. One of the visits was on January 9, 2015 to meet with the then United States Envoy to Sudan and South Sudan, Ambassador Donald Booth to share the association's concerns about the 2013 war in South Sudan. A letter was presented to the Ambassador during the visit as well.⁵⁷

ESSCA-USA Engagement with the Republic of South Sudan

This section focuses on ESSCA-USA engagement with South Sudan and its people. It delineates some of the initiatives and programs proposed and undertaken by the association to address socio-cultural, political, and economic issues of South Sudan and suggests strategies for overcoming difficulties facing the nation and its citizens. Some of the initiatives included, inviting South Sudanese politicians, elders and community leaders to attend the association's annual conferences in

⁵⁷ ESSCA-USA Letter to Ambassador Donald Booth, 2015 (Appendix 4).

the United States; convening conferences in South Sudan to address issues of concern to South Sudan and Equatoria; and writing of press statements on issues affecting the civilian population such as war, political intimidation, targeted ethnic killings, gender-based sexual abuses, destructions of people's properties and livelihood, and other forms of human rights violations.

Certainly, the earliest engagement of ESSCA-USA on South Sudan's affairs dates back to September 2004 when it invited Dr. John Garang De Mabior, Chairman and Commander in Chief of the Sudan People Liberation Movement and Army (SPLM/A) to participate at the fourth Annual Conference of the association held in Des Moines, Iowa (September 4-5, 2004). During the conference, and as noted in chapter three, Dr. Garang De Mabior gave a speech outlining the vision, mission, and objectives of the movement. He also briefed the conference attendees of the progress made in the peace negotiations process with then government of Sudan. He stated that the peace partners signed six protocols namely, The Machakos Protocol (2002), Protocol on Power Sharing (2004), Wealth sharing (2004), the Resolution of the Abyei Conflict (2004), the Resolution of conflict in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile States (2004), and Security Arrangements (2003 and 2004).⁵⁸ Dr. Garang further noted that the new agreement, which became known as the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) transcended the 1972 peace agreement signed in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia between the Anyanya leaders and then Sudan government.

Following the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005; the inevitable referendum and subsequent independence of South Sudan in 2011; the eruption of war in December 2013, and its impact on Equatoria and its people; ESSCA-USA's engagement with South Sudan became heavily focused on political developments in South Sudan. Release of press statements, convening of emergency conferences and meetings with political and community leaders from South Sudan and in the Diaspora to address specific and time-sensitive issues, as well as other initiatives spearheaded by the association, are some of the ways in which ESSCA-USA engaged with South Sudan.

ESSCA-USA Press Statements

Over the years ESSCA-USA issued several press statements on specific issues of concern to South Sudanese in general, and Equatorians in particular, such as

⁵⁸ "A Summary of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement," Conciliation Resources (2006), <https://www.c-r.org/accord/sudan/summary-comprehensive-peace-agreement> last accessed, June 13, 2019.

the amendment of the transitional constitution of the Republic of South Sudan, detention of political leaders from Equatoria, targeted ethnic killings of civilians, land grabbing, rape, gender-based sexual abuses, and other human rights violations. Prior to the referendum and subsequent independence of the country in 2011, the National Legislative Assembly began the process of constitutional review to amend the interim constitution in anticipation of the independence of South Sudan. ESSCA-USA leadership rallied the South Sudanese Diaspora worldwide to review the Draft Transitional Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan, 2011 and recommend amendments to ensure that South Sudan become a democratic nation consistent with the aspirations of the South Sudanese. As a result, on May 6, 2011, ESSCA-USA and the South Sudanese Diaspora submitted a memorandum for action by the Southern Sudan Legislative Assembly on the review and amendment of the transitional provisions on permanent constitution-



From left: Benaiah Duku, Chairman ESSCA-USA Board of Directors; Alison Mazinda, Vice President, ESSCA-USA; Gen. Salva Kiir Mayardit, President of South Sudan; Sebit Alley, SPLM Representative for North-east, USA; and Dominic B. Wani, President DMV (Washington DC, Maryland, and Virginia). The photo was taken in 2006 in Washington DC during Salva Kiir Mayardit's visit to the USA.

making process; and establishment, composition and function of the Executive, Legislature, and Judicial branches of the government in the draft Transitional Constitution of 2011. The memorandum identified the provisions for amendment and proposed specific actions to be taken by the Legislative Assembly for improvement. For instance, the framers of the memorandum proposed that, “the permanent constitution making-process must be amended to provide for a people-driven process, through a constituent assembly ..., and a referendum in which all the people vote to approve the constitution as the supreme law of the land, should be the only legal basis for the enactment of the constitution and its coming into force by the sovereign authority of the people.”⁵⁹

As a result, the memorandum urged that the provisions on permanent constitution-making process should be amended by the Southern Sudan Legislative Assembly (SSLA) to provide for the following:

- A constituent assembly, elected in a free and fair election, and not a constitutional review commission appointed by the President, drives the constitution-making process.
- A Constituent Assembly should be responsible for selection of experts and their endorsement for appointment to draft the text of the permanent constitution.
- A plenary session of the Constituent Assembly should be responsible for debating the content, provisions, and stipulations of the constitution.
- The Constituent Assembly to mandate a public consultation process on the constitution, including through a constitutional conference to take the views of all political parties, civil society, members of the public, including parties without representation in the assembly, and factoring in any proposed amendments and views to the draft constitution.
- The Constituent Assembly promulgates and passes the final draft constitution for adoption and recommends it for a vote in a constitutional referendum.
- A YES vote in a referendum enacts the constitution and brings it into force, which at this point brings the transitional period to an end.
- The Constituent Assembly dissolves, and an election of new institutions

⁵⁹ ESSCA-USA and South Sudanese Diaspora Memorandum on the Draft Transitional Constitution of the ROSS [Republic of South Sudan], May 6, 2011, page 3 (Appendix 5).

occurs (President, Legislatures, Governors) under a new permanent constitution.⁶⁰

Unfortunately, the SSLA rejected the recommendations because of undue influence from the Presidency and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) party.

On July 3, 2014, ESSCA-USA published a press release on allegations of an assassination attempt on the life of the Governor of Central Equatoria State Mr. Clement Wani Konga, arguing that ESSCA-USA takes all rumors seriously irrespective of their veracity, especially given the political climate prevalent in South Sudan at the time. The press statement further urged the government of South Sudan to allay the fears and concerns of South Sudanese and deescalate the charged political environment by immediately returning to the peace negotiation in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and engage in a genuine effort for peaceful resolution of the conflict.⁶¹

On December 15, 2014, ESSCA-USA release a statement to commemorate the first anniversary of the South Sudan crisis that began in December 2013. The association's leadership called on both President Salva Kiir Mayardit and Dr. Riek Machar to step aside and allow the formation of a transitional government under the leadership of a neutral and competent leader to pave the way for national reconciliation and elections. That, the transitional constitution clearly calls for election in 2015 so there should be no delay in holding elections regardless of the political situation. That South Sudanese people have a right under the constitution to elect a new leader. That President Kiir Mayardit's term of office is over, and he must step aside and allow the South Sudanese people to determine their future democratically.

ESSCA-USA leadership also called on the international community, and the Troika countries (US, UK, and Norway), to rededicate themselves to help end the conflict in South Sudan, by pressuring both the Government of South Sudan and the Sudan People Liberation Movement In Opposition (SPLM-IO) to end the conflict and expedite the formation of national transitional government to lead efforts of national reconciliation and immediate elections. The association's leadership also called on the international community and IGAD to follow through with sanctions and military intervention should both sides fail to meet their commitments to recent agreements. That the international community must push for a neutral and competent transitional government so that the work of

⁶⁰ *ibid.* pages, 3-4.

⁶¹ ESSCA-USA Statement on Rumor on Assassination Attempt on Gov. Clement Konga, July 3, 2014, pp. 1-2 (Appendix 6).



President Salva Kiir Mayardit of South Sudan and Mr. Martin Abucha, President of ESSCA-USA, after a meeting in Washington, DC in 2006.

national reconciliation and election can begin.

Finally, the association's leadership called on all South Sudanese in South Sudan and the Diaspora to unite and actively demand peace, security, and democracy. That, South Sudanese must not settle for the defunct and inept leadership of President Salva Kiir Mayardit or Dr. Riek Machar who have thrown South Sudan into the abyss and ruined the country because of their political and personal ambitions. That the citizens of South Sudan deserve better leadership and an effective government that can deliver services and meet the aspirations of all South Sudanese.⁶²

On August 19, 2015, ESSCA-USA published a press statement condemning the arrest of Governor Joseph B. Bakosoro of Western Equatoria State, who was dismissed by Presidential Decree on August 16, 2015 together with five other

⁶² ESSCA-USA Statement on the One Year Anniversary of the South Sudan Crisis, December 15, 2014, pages 2 & 3, pp. 1-3, (Appendix 7).

state governors. The association condemned the arrest of the Governor and called for his immediate release. The statement further called on President Salva Kiir Mayardit and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) Chief of Staff to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the Governor.⁶³

Another press statement was release by the association condemning the killing of Equatorians in Kemiru village, near Juba in early March 2012. It noted that the continuous inter-ethnic conflicts in many parts of Equatoria and South Sudan are unacceptable. The press statement urged leaders at the national and state levels levels of government to move swiftly to bring the culprits to justice.⁶⁴ That ESSCA-USA leadership stands ready to help in any way possible; and will not accept anything less than safe, secure, and free South Sudan. In a press statement dated September 2, 2013, ESSCA-USA leadership, at its thirteenth annual conference in the State of Michigan, appealed to President Salva Kiir Mayardit to extend amnesty to Peter Abdelrahman Sule who was detained by the government.⁶⁵

As a community-based entity, ESSCA-USA often acknowledges tragic life events such as death of a community member, through issuance of press statements, or extending financial support whenever possible. For example, on November 11, 2014, the association published a press statement condemning the brutal murder of the first female Mayor of Yei County, Madam Oba Cecilia Tito and her Office Manager, Emmanuel Lemi. The statement denounced the barbaric act in the strongest terms possible, and that the murders added to the string of brazen attacks and killings in Juba alarming the nation.⁶⁶ Similarly, following the passing of Dr. Wani Tombe, Leader of the Greater Equatoria Council of Rights (GRECOR), on June 7, 2015 ESSCA-USA published a press statement on his passing and offered condolences to members of GRECOR leadership and to the family of the deceased. The press statement praised Dr. Tombe for his courage and for offering an alternative vision and approach to resolving the crisis in South Sudan.⁶⁷

⁶³ ESSCA-USA Statement on the Arrest of Governor Bakasoro, August 19, 2015, pp. 1-2, (Appendix 8).

⁶⁴ ESSCA –USA Statement on Killings of Equatorians in Kemiru, Juba, March 2012, pp. 1-2, (Appendix 9).

⁶⁵ Equatorian South Sudanese Community Association in the United States Call for the Unconditional Release of Peter Abdelraham Sule, September 2, 2013, (Appendix 10).

⁶⁶ ESSCA-USA Statement on the Murder of Madam Oba Cecilia Tito, November 11, 2014, (Appendix 11).

⁶⁷ ESSCA-USA Press Statement on Passing of Dr. Wani Tombe, June 7, 2015, pp. 1, (Appendix 12).

In advancing its advocacy program to the highest level possible, ESSCA-USA engaged South Sudanese politicians and community leaders and presented policy recommendations that address the challenges of South Sudan. In the past several years, for instance, ESSCA-USA convened or facilitated extraordinary meetings and conferences to address critical issues affecting South Sudan, and the Equatoria region and its people in particular. Consequently, on September 18, 2010, ESSCA-USA petitioned the President of the Government of Southern Sudan Salva Kiir Mayardit to meet with its leadership during Kiir Mayardit's visit to the United States at the time. The main reason for the proposed meeting was to present the resolutions and recommendations for action of the tenth ESSCA-USA annual conference convened in Washington D.C, in September 2010. The key components of the resolutions centered on the South Sudan referendum, organization and networking for skill transfer and absorption, economic development, and equal opportunity, and responding to the Lord Resistance Army (LRA) threats in greater Equatoria region.⁶⁸

Similarly, the association championed the concept of an Equatoria Conference, and played a crucial role in organizing the first Equatoria Conference in Juba in 2011. Held under the theme *Justice, unity, and prosperity* the conference brought together delegates from the Diaspora and South Sudan to deliberate on critical issues of concern to Equatorians and their place in South Sudan. Some of the conference resolutions reiterated Equatorians' demands for a federal system of governance in South Sudan; equitable representation of Equatorians in the three pillars of the government and in the sovereign ministries; development and security, and recognition of the role of women and youth in governance, and enhancement of their capacity for effective participation.⁶⁹

Following the conclusion of the 2011 Equatoria conference in Juba, the delegates from the Diaspora, led by Dr. Hakim Dario and Jane Abucha, then Acting President of ESSCA-USA held a meeting with the three Governors of Equatoria states (Central, Eastern, and Western Equatoria) Clement Konga, Louis Lobong Lojore, and Joseph B. Bakosoro, respectively, on April 18, 2011. The main agenda of the meeting was to address Diaspora priorities and the need to establish a Diaspora Secretariat and Coordination Office in Juba, and to address the urgent educational needs of Equatorian Students in Uganda and

⁶⁸ ESSCA-USA Petition to GOSS President, H. E. Salva Kiir Mayardit, September 18, 2010, pp. 1-4, (Appendix 13).

⁶⁹ Equatoria Conference 2011 – Justice, Unity and Prosperity Communique, April 16, 2011, (Appendix 14).

Kenya. The three governors welcomed the Diaspora initiative and accepted the principle of coordination and regular contact with the Diaspora. The Governor of Central Equatoria State proposed that the Diaspora should liaise with his office, and relevant authorities of the state to follow up on the application for a plot of land for building the proposed ESSCA-USA Diaspora office and the Juba library. Other topics that were discussed included attracting investors to the three Equatoria states, facilitation for Diaspora integration in development, and addressing the discriminatory policies of the government of South Sudan against Equatorian students studying in Uganda and Kenya, whereby students hailing from Equatoria were granted less government funding compared to students from Bahr el Ghazal and Upper Nile.⁷⁰

In February 2013, a second Equatoria conference was convened in Juba by the three governors of the three Equatoria states. Under the theme *Consolidating Justice, Unity, and Prosperity*, the main objective of the conference was to review the resolutions of the Equatoria conference 2011 and to assess the status of the three states, and deliberate on key issues pertaining to security, governance, federalism, constitution making, development, land grabbing, peace and reconciliation.⁷¹ On the follow up on the Equatoria Conference resolutions 2011, in particular, the 2013 Equatoria conference reaffirmed the 2011 Equatoria conference resolutions, which were not implemented. The conference also adopted new resolutions including establishment of Equatoria Consultative Council (ECC) comprising of 27 members equally divided between the three states of Equatoria and with members drawn from chiefs, women, youth, Community Based Organizations (CBOs), religious leaders, political leaders, elders, representative of farmers/pastoralist/business community, representatives of the governments of the three states of Equatoria, and the three Governors. It was also resolved that the national and state governments should implement the Equatoria conference resolutions of 2011.⁷²

Prior to the 2013 conference in Juba, ESSCA-USA on behalf of the Equatorian Diaspora, extended a memorandum dated January 10, 2013 to the three governors of the Equatoria states. The association applauded the governors' joint efforts to hold a conference and articulate their position on the political crisis and violence in South Sudan. The memorandum further urged the governors to exert pressure

⁷⁰ ESSCA-USA: Report of Diaspora Meeting with Equatoria Governors – 18, April 2011, pp. 1-6.

⁷¹ Equatoria Conference 2013: consolidating Justice, Unity and Prosperity – Resolutions, February 18, 2013, pp. 1-4, (Appendix 15).

⁷² *ibid.* pages 1 & 2.

on President Salva Kiir Mayardit and his Vice President Dr. Riek Machar to address the political crisis, and that, the Governors should work for the interest of Equatorians and speak up against the mistreatment and marginalization of Equatorians in the political process.⁷³ Although ESSCA-USA and other members of the Diaspora did not attend the 2013 conference in Juba, due to scheduling conflicts, its leadership suggested issues of grave concern to be deliberated at the conference, including:

“1) Strategies to implement the resolutions of the Equatoria Conference 2011, 2) Establishment of the Diaspora Secretariat which was agreed on in the 2011 Equatoria conference in Juba, 3) Improving and investing in the education of Equatorian Children and Youth, and 4) Developing and enacting a strategy for a strong diversified economy that will absorb the Equatorian labor force and alleviate poverty.”⁷⁴

Lastly, in October 2013 ESSCA-USA hosted Vice President Wani Igga, in Grand Rapids, Michigan and presented a series of policy recommendations to address the political problems facing South Sudan. The association’s leadership recommended that the Government of South Sudan should revisit the resolutions of the 2011 Equatoria conference in Juba, and take tangible steps to address issues of corruption, good governance, services delivery, infrastructure development, and expanding democracy in South Sudan.

Equatorian Community Leaders in Diaspora Press Statements

In attempts to coordinate its advocacy work with other Equatorian leaders beyond the United States, ESSCA-USA partnered with Equatorian leaders in United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada to present a unified front in advocating and publicizing the political and insecurity situations affecting civilians in South Sudan, and in Equatoria in particular. These initiatives became more prevalent following the outbreak of war in South Sudan in December 2013. Although the Equatorian leaders in the Diaspora published numerous press statements since 2013, only a few are highlighted here. On August 11, 2015, the Community leaders responded to IGAD-Plus proposed compromise Agreement on the Resolution of conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS) signed by the South Sudan warring parties [i.e., the government of South Sudan and the opposition parties]. The press statement

⁷³ ESSCA-USA Memorandum to Equatoria Governors on Ongoing Crisis in South Sudan, January 10, 2013, (Appendix 16).

⁷⁴ Letter to Equatorian Governors EC2013, February 8, 2012, pages 1 & 2, pp. 1-2, (Appendix 17).

was addressed to the Chairman of IGAD-Plus and members of the Troika countries, and the United Nations (UN), African Union (AU), European Union (EU), and China, with a copy to the Government of the Republic of South Sudan, the SPLM-IO, and Governors of the three Equatoria states. The leaders argued that, the signed peace agreement ignored the position of Equatorians articulated in a letter dated May 10th, 2015, with respect to the issues of Presidency, federalism, and the SPLM/SPLA malpractices in Equatoria and other marginalized parts of the country; and the position of ESSCA-USA, articulated in the “South Sudan: the Way Forward,” published in 2014. Indeed, these two documents according to the leaders outlined the views and demands of Equatorians in the Diaspora. The leaders proposed specific demands to be incorporated into the peace agreement including the adoption of federalism as a preferred system of government in South Sudan, demilitarization of the capital city Juba, and public sector reforms.

The statement further highlighted concerns about continued land grabbing in Equatoria by pastoralists from other regions; the flaws in the power sharing agreement which favored the government of Salva Kiir Mayardit, and the SPLM-IO under the leadership of Dr. Riek Machar Teny; and the tendency to view the conflict as a struggle between different factions of the SPLM/A rather than a national conflict. The leaders also called for the transformation of the SPLA into a national army comprising all nationals of South Sudan. They further welcomed the proposal for the establishment of a Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing (CTRH), and the creation of a Hybrid Court for South Sudan (HCSS) to address issues of justice, accountability and healing stipulated in the agreement.⁷⁵

On April 12, 2016, the Equatorian community leaders in Diaspora extended an open letter to the President of the Republic of South Sudan Salva Kiir Mayardit and the First Vice President designate Dr. Riek Machar Teny regarding the implementation of the ARCSS signed in 2015. In the letter, the leaders outlined points of contention in the agreement including the continuation of fighting in Equatoria, Western Bahr el Ghazal, and parts of Upper Nile regions, the exclusiveness of the agreement and the Transitional Government of National Unity (TGoNU), and the failure of the agreement to address the root causes of the problem. The statement also rejected the creation of cantonment sites in Equatoria, and it objected to the Presidential Order for the creation of the 28 states announced on October 4, 2015 to replace the existing 10 states. Land grabbing in Equatoria, militarization of the Equatoria states, as well as the continued crack

⁷⁵ Equatorian Community in Diaspora, “A response to IGAD-Plus Proposed Compromise Agreement on Resolution of conflict in South Sudan, August 11, 2015, pp. 1-5.

down on freedom, and human rights violations are some of the concerns raised by the leaders. The leaders also called for justice and accountability for corruption, human rights abuses, and war crimes.⁷⁶

In reaction to the government of South Sudan's policy of denying access to humanitarian agencies to deliver food to affected communities, the Equatorian community leaders in Diaspora extended a letter to IGAD-Plus, the AU and the UN on July 25, 2016. They argued that the government was using starvation of civilians as a weapon of destruction and prevention of civilians from going out in search of food. They also condemned the on-going use of rape and gender-based violence perpetuated against women and girls as a weapon of war, and the arrest of journalist for writing articles critical of the government. They advocated for an alternative government that is inclusive and representative of all South Sudanese. The leaders outlined six main points as follows:

1. Condemn the use of starvation as a weapon of mass destruction;
2. Condemn government action to prevent civilians from leaving Juba and South Sudan;
3. Condemn the human rights abuses committed by the Government against its own citizens;
4. Condemn the lack of freedom in the country and the growing authoritarianism it represents;
5. Reject attempts by President Salva Kiir to replace the First Vice President, Dr. Riek Machar Teny with General Taban Deng Gai; and
6. Support placing South Sudan under UN Trusteeship until a fair and transparent election is held enabling new leadership to be chosen by the people.

They concluded by calling upon the peace partners to remain seized on the matter of restoring and enforcing peace in South Sudan.⁷⁷

When civilians were being killed in South Sudan, particularly along 'major' roads in late 2016, the Equatorian community leaders in Diaspora published a press statement condemning the killing of civilians along Juba-Yei, and Juba-Nimule roads. The press statement was published on October 17, 2016. The leaders were dismayed by President Slava Kiir Mayardit's disregard of the killings of innocent civilians and his unwillingness to investigate the murders.

⁷⁶ Open Letter to the President of the Republic of South Sudan Gen. Salva Kiir Mayardit and First Vice President designate Dr. Riek Machar Teny from Equatorian Leaders in the Diaspora on the implementation of the Agreement on Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (ARCISS), April 12, 2016, pp. 1-6.

⁷⁷ The Chair of IGAD-Plus, c/o H.E Hailemariam Dessalegn, Prime Minister of Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, The President, UN Security Council, African Union, the European Union, July 25, 2016, page 3, pp. 1-3.

They further noted other killings of civilians in Juba and elsewhere in Equatoria by “unknown gunman” including those that occurred since 2013. They pointed out that majority of the victims of the “unknown gunmen” were Equatorians and other non-Dinka nationals. The press statement called for an end to the suffering of people in the country by ensuring justice, fairness, and equal treatment for all South Sudanese.⁷⁸

On February 7, 2017, the Equatorian community leaders in Diaspora sent a letter to the Chairperson of the Africa Union Commission, IGAD-Plus, the Troika, President of the UN Security Council, and UN Secretary General, on the illegality of the TGoNU formed in 2016. The leaders contended that the ARCSS signed in 2015 had collapsed following the dislodgment of Dr. Riek Machar Teny from Juba in 2016. The press described the National Dialogue announced by Slava Kiir Mayardit on December 4, 2016 as flawed and an exclusive process. That the president created the National Dialogue as a calculated move to consolidate his continued stay in power. In order to achieve a genuine National Dialogue, the press release proposed the following steps to be undertaken:

a. New inclusive peace talks are needed under the auspices of UN, African Union, and IGAD-Plus that should be conducted outside South Sudan. b) A re-constituted Transitional Government of National Unity (TGoNU) and Parliament without Salva Kiir Mayardit and Riek Machar Teny [is a necessity]. That, the new TGoNU must include those excluded from the ARCSS of August 2015. c) The Establishment Order for creating 28 states in South Sudan must be cancelled, along with any additional new states created. A new formula for new states for South Sudan needs to be agreed on as part of a new peace process. d) Repatriation of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to their ancestral homeland, including all historical IDPs in Equatoria. e). Appoint an interim neutral leader to run the country during an interim period – someone who has not been involved in the current administration in Juba since 2005 – to be agreed to as part of the Peace Talks. f) The Patronage for the National Dialogue must sit with UN, AU, IGAD-Plus in order to ensure the integrity of the process; and not with President Kiir Mayardit. g) Establish security guarantee in the country, as part of the new peace agreement; and deploy Regional Protection Force. h) The agenda, scope, and committee (or any other bodies) for the National Dialogue must be set and agreed upon by all the stakeholders, [and] i) Call for, and hold an inclusive National Dialogue.

⁷⁸ Press Release, Equatorian Leaders in Diaspora Condemn Killings of Civilians in South Sudan, October 17, 2016, page 1, pp. 1-2, (Appendix 18).

According to the leaders, the National Dialogue should pave the way for writing of the permanent constitution, national census, and general elections. The leaders also urged the AU to deliver on the outcomes of its [2014] report on South Sudan related to human right abuses committed during the war that erupted in 2013. The release of the report, according to the leaders is part, and parcel of achieving peace and justice in the country.⁷⁹

In early 2020, ESSCA-USA leadership attended joint monthly meetings with Equatorian community leaders of the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Norway, and Egypt to discuss pertinent issues affecting the Equatorian people, participated in radio interviews, etc. The Equatorian leaders in Diaspora also published joint press statements addressing some of the pressing issues facing the region. For example, on May 8, 2020 the Equatorian leaders in Diaspora published “Open Letter to President of South Sudan Slava Kiir Mayardit” on the influx of cattle into Equatoria region from other states, especially from Jonglei State. The leaders in Diaspora voiced their deep concern regarding the cattle influx from Upper Nile and Bahr el Ghazal Regions into Equatoria Region, and the associated security risks and socio-economic implications that is negatively impacting on the people of Equatoria.⁸⁰ On June 14, 2020, the Equatorian leaders in Diaspora also published “An Open Letter to the President and Vice President of the Republic of South Sudan,” on the massacre and displacement of civilians by the SPLA-IO and SSPDF in Equatoria. The leaders expressed their deepest concerns and disappointment about the continuous killings, displacements, as well as gross human rights violations among the civilian populations, perpetrated by some army generals, officers, and soldiers under the respective commands of the President and First Vice President in Central Equatoria State and other parts of the Greater Equatoria Region.⁸¹

In conclusion, it can be reiterated that, since its formation in 2003, ESSCA-USA has kept its commitment of advocating for an inclusive, just, and sustainable political system that respect people and human rights of all South Sudanese regardless of their social and ethnic difference. The collaboration with Equatorian leaders in UK, Canada, Australia, Sweden, Finland, Norway and Egypt indicates

⁷⁹ Equatorian Leaders in Diaspora Statement on a Shaky Foundation of TGoNU, February 7, 2017, pages 2, 4 & 5, pp. 1-6.

⁸⁰ “Open Letter to President of South Sudan Slava Kiir Mayardit,” By Equatorian Leaders in Diaspora, May 8, 2020.

⁸¹ “An Open Letter to the President and Vice President of the Republic of South Sudan,” By Equatorian Leaders in Diaspora, June 14, 2020.

that ESSCA-USA was able to draw the attention of almost all Equatorians in the global Diaspora to the social, political, and economic challenges facing South Sudan and its people. Similarly, its advocacy work succeeded in bring the crisis of South Sudan to fore front of the international debate on armed conflicts and their impacts on the lives of the civilian population and on resources and development of the country.