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SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

November 9, 2007

His Excellency Salva Kiir Mayardit
Vice President of Sudan,
President of the Government of South Sudan
The Mission of Southern Sudan to the United States
1233 20th Street, NW, Suite 602
Washington, D.C. 20036

Dear Mr. Vice President,

We would like to offer our greetings and congratulate you on all of your efforts that have served to advance the Sudanese people towards a new era of peace and prosperity. We welcome you again to Washington, D.C., this week, and we look forward to reaffirming in person the United States' partnership with your government.

We write to express our concern with regards to a wave of child abductions reported in Jonglei and neighboring states in South Sudan. This situation was brought to our attention by our constituent, Gabriel Kou Solomon, of St. Paul, Minnesota. Mr. Solomon is a native of Southern Sudan, and most of his family continues to reside there. On October 3, 2007, Gabriel's nieces, Yar and Ajak Achiek Mading, of the ages of 18 months and 3 years old, were abducted from their family home in Jonglei. During this incident, the aggressors kidnapped Gabriel's nieces and viciously attacked other family members, causing the death of their great-grandmother, Yom Dit, and leaving their grandmother Yar Riek grievously injured. Student organizations at the University of Minnesota have joined Mr. Solomon in seeking freedom for the girls and for all children who have been similarly abducted in South Sudan. The "Save Yar" campaign has received prominent coverage in the Minnesota news media.

We understand that Jonglei State Governor Philip Thon Leek, in correspondence with the U.S. Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, expressed his belief that the Murle militia is responsible for abducting approximately 450 children in the last two years from the states of Jonglei and neighboring Eastern Equatoria. We have been informed that the Gurtong Peace Project reported on October 30, 2007 that abductions carried out by the Murle militia had accelerated in the previous two months. This worrisome trend had led eight village schools to close temporarily for fear that students would be abducted.

We believe this crisis presents an important opportunity for the Government of South Sudan to distinguish itself in the world community as a government that protects the rights of its most vulnerable citizens. We stand ready to assist your government in taking advantage of this opportunity to further demonstrate its commitment to its children. We are sympathetic to the challenges that the Government of South Sudan faces in reducing the proliferation of small arms among civilian groups in the post-civil war era, which in turn constrains the ability of your Government to reign in militias. We also acknowledge the difficulties in providing general security over the large land mass of South Sudan, especially given the depletion of public resources that occurred during the former civil war period. Despite these challenges, we are committed to working with you to help free the children who have become victims of militia violence and protect other children from the same fate.

We respectfully request your assistance on this matter, Mr. Vice President, by exhausting all peaceful methods of securing the voluntary release of Yar and Ajak Mading and all abducted children held by the Murle. We understand that this is a very difficult task, but we are certain that you are of one accord with us in our determination to pursue all avenues possible to save these children. In our discussions with Mr. Solomon and members of the Save Yar campaign, they have suggested various options for a possible negotiated settlement to release the abducted children. We have offered to pass along these suggestions for your consideration, in the hopes that all suggestions serve to increase the tools at your disposal in your efforts to resolve this crisis.

In our discussions, members of the Save Yar campaign suggested that a negotiated settlement with the Murle might include an agreement for voluntary disarmament or safe storage and disuse of weapons, and that this agreement would ideally include an acknowledgment of the economic value of weapons. To the extent that cattle raids and child abduction reflect a competition for the scarce economic resources of Jonglei and its adjoining states, there may also be a role for the U.S. to play in assisting your government in addressing these economic challenges. Per these suggestions, we are committed to working with the United States Agency for International Development to marshal resources for economic development in that region through our nation's cooperative partnership with Sudan for development. If there are other ways that we might provide assistance to you in addressing this crisis of abducted children, we are open to your suggestions.

Understanding that you are very busy during your time in Washington and that it is very short notice, we would like to draw your attention to the request of Mr. Solomon to meet personally with you to discuss the recommendations that he has shared with our offices with regards to the child abduction issue. He is available any time through November 10th, and would appreciate an audience with you. Again, we understand your schedule constraints and thank you for consideration of this meeting request.

As a key member of the Government of Southern Sudan, we thank you for your commitment to peace and stability in the region, which you have worked tirelessly to foster. We believe that the resolution of the wave of child abductions is critical for working towards a secure and hopeful future for the people of Southern Sudan. Children, after all, represent the future of any society, and in Southern Sudan we hope they will carry on the torch of peace that leaders such as you work for everyday.

We are very grateful for your attention to this matter and hope that you have a productive visit in Washington. We look forward to hearing your responses on these matters, and we are open to further information that would improve our understanding of this challenge.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Norm Coleman in black ink.

Norm Coleman
United States Senate

Handwritten signature of Amy Klobuchar in black ink.

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senate