

Telar Deng calls to review Dinka customary law

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By Manyang Mayom

May 27, 2010 (RUMBEK) – The Caretaker- Governor of Lakes State, Telar Ring Deng has appealed to the next elected Governor, Engineer Chol Tong Mayay, to initiate a traditional chief's conference in greater Bahr-EI-Ghazal to amend a Dinka customary law known as "Wath Aleel".

Wath Aleel, a Dinka customary law was established in 1999 in Wunlit. It imposes forceful marriage in the Dinka society and blood compensation in the form of cows. The law means "A gate of stone" and it only covers Bahr-EI-Ghazal region in South Sudan.

During Daniel Awet's term as governor of Lakes State, one article was amended in the law by changing the number of cows paid by adulterers from 15 to 31 cows. The compensation for killing someone was changed from 51 to 71 cows. However, other states such as Warrap in Northern Bahr-EI-Ghazal and Western Bahr-EI-Ghazal were not involved in amending this article.

Telar made his call in a speech delivered on Wednesday when he was sworn into the legislative assembly of Lakes State's Lawmakers. He noted that the "Assembly is charged with the responsibility to protect the community welfare, bring peace and unity to the people of this state."

Telar Ring Deng affirmed that he realizes that the law was amended, however, in respect to law-making processes, and particularly a common law like "Wath Aleel" which covers the Dinka of Bahr El Ghazal, he urged the new Governor of Lakes State and the Assembly to request that the governors and assemblies of Greater Bahr El Ghazal and their chiefs hold a tribal chiefs' Conference in order to make any amendments that are deemed necessary.

He said that for Lakes State Legislative Assembly to revise the "Wath Aleel" Dinka customary law of Bahr El Ghazal without the participation of other Greater Bahr El Ghazal States is null and void and should immediately be repealed.

Southern Sudan is close to holding the Referendum in 2011 to decide whether the country will remain united or separate into two countries. The South Sudan Referendum is only 225 days away; however, Deng said that Lakes State must lead its citizens in making a well informed choice in both cases. The citizens must be made aware of the pros and cons of their decision in the referendum.

Since its foundation in 2005, the Lakes state government was overwhelmed with improving the infrastructure, education and the health services, so the security was neglected resulting into killings and corruption as well as nepotism in various institutions.

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