

Turkey Seeks To Tighten Mutual Cooperation With South Sudan-Ambassador



Ambassador HALUK AĞCA

By Phrach Mach

Turkish government is actively seeking deeper bilateral ties and common ground on South Sudan development. In an exclusive interview with Turkish Ambassador to South Sudan Ambassador HALUK AĞCA, he stressed the Turkish determination to see meaningful implementation of the August 2015 signed peace deal, pledged to boost trade, and unveiled agreements to bolster cooperation in areas ranging from health-care to the environment, tourism, finance, education and communication.

However, Ambassador Haluk said Turkey-South Sudan relationship will see the best period of all time if a final deal is reached on pending bilateral agreements between the two countries, which he said will form the legal basis of cooperation to meet mutual demands for the benefits of both countries.

Turkey and South Sudan may be on opposite sides of the globe, but the two countries have forged a strong partnership. HALUK AĞCA, the Turkish head of mission to South Sudan, discusses this partnership in the below Excerpts.

How would you describe the Turkey's overall relationship with the Republic of South Sudan? Could you cite some of the major reasons why the relationship with South Sudan is important to Turkey?

I would like to thank you for this interview.

Turkey and South Sudan have friendly ties and both parties desire to promote bilateral relations in all possible fields. As is known, Turkey recognized the Republic of South Sudan, as soon as the country declared her independence. We hope to develop the friendly relations between the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of South Sudan to serve the best interests of both parties in all areas. Since the inception of the

Republic of South Sudan, Turkey has been trying to contribute to the capacity building efforts of the Government of the Republic of South Sudan. Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency namely TİKA decided to open up an office in Juba to carry on humanitarian and technical aids more efficiently.

We are pleased to see that there has been a significant progress on the path of a lasting peace and stability in the country. To support this process, international community should intensify all sorts of cooperation with the Republic of South Sudan, particularly in economic sphere. The South Sudanese people should experience the fruits of the peace so that they should be encouraged to walk on this path.

The peaceful resolution of the internal conflict also offered an opportunity to speed up the country's development and state-building process in view of the fact that the country has rich natural resources.

Since the country is situated in a conflict-ridden neighborhood, a peaceful and stable South Sudan will be an important asset to the regional stability and peace. The recent developments are promising.

Turkey has been supporting the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) by contributing 24 policemen to UN Police Force, namely, UNPOL mission in the Republic of South Sudan. Turkey contributed to UNOCHA's humanitarian assistance for the Republic of South Sudan by donating 500,000 US Dollar during Oslo Conference in May 2014. Turkey became a member of IGAD Partners Forum as of 2008 and signed a Memorandum of Understanding with IGAD in 2012. We have always supported IGAD's mediation efforts to seek a peaceful solution for the current conflict in South Sudan and provided IGAD with 100,000 US Dollar to help IGAD's peace ef-

forts in the Horn of Africa.

Turkey will continue humanitarian, technical and development assistance to help the capacity building efforts of the Republic of South Sudan. We are looking forward to the conclusion of the agreement on TİKA (development agency) which will facilitate such projects and programs.

We also attach importance to the development of our bilateral economic and trade relations. Turkish economy is highly diversified in terms of production and we are ready to cooperate with the Republic of South Sudan in all sectors of economy.

Until recently or to put it bluntly, throughout our history we mostly focused on our relations with the West in many senses. To enrich our foreign relations and to increase our friends especially in the past decade we made extensive efforts to strengthen our relations with other regions and continents. Sub-Saharan African countries are among them. In Sub-Saharan Africa, we are planning to establish embassies in all capital cities without exception. Currently we have 39 embassies in Africa.

We hope that we will be able to play a role in construction of South Sudan's roads, river ports, railways, airports, houses, hospitals, universities and so on. Because the Turkish contractors are capable of undertaking all sorts of construction projects, including petrochemical plants, power plants, tourism facilities, irrigation, industrial plants, roads, health facilities, bridges, pipelines, housing projects, airports etc. In the period between 1972-June 2015, the Turkish contractors have undertaken 8,606 projects in 104 countries with a total value of 312 billion USD all over the world. Turkish construction firms have already proved their competitiveness in international arena and can undertake some infrastructure projects in South Sudan.

We plan to launch Turkish Airlines' (THY) flights between our countries a frequency of a three flights a week. THY or Turkish Airlines' flights between the two countries will facilitate and enhance the contacts of the Turkish and the South Sudanese citizens, business people and officials.

And now South Sudan rivals have formed Transitional Government of National Unity (TGoNU) to end two and half years civil war, how is Turkish government planning to support the new formed unity government?

We have all along been providing humanitarian, technical and development aids as well as training for South Sudanese professionals. Every year Turkey grants 20-30 scholarships to South Sudanese students for university education. We will go ahead with similar programs and projects. Such assistances and projects will gain impetus and increase over time.

Gearing now more toward issues facing South Sudan specifically, as a nation — if you had to pinpoint only three issues — what would you say are the three most critical issues facing South Sudanese (that government should tackle right now)? How has Turkey been able to help in those areas and, if [they have] not, how could they help?

First of all, peace, unemployment and skilled manpower are apparently more pressing than other issues. Capacity-building process may progress in parallel to the creation of employment. It is of importance to start the training of skilled manpower programs. It goes without saying that peace and a relative stability are fundamental for development. Turkey may contribute to promoting stability and prosperity in the country through economic cooperation.

Turkey is among the world's leading producers of agricultural products; textiles; motor vehicles, ships and other transportation equipment; construction materials; consumer electronics and home appliances.

Turkey has always been self-sufficient in food production. Against this background, Turkey can help the agricultural development of South Sudan along with animal husbandry and aquaculture. These sectors are labor intensive sectors with ample employment opportunities. Agriculture is a prerequisite for food security, national security, social stability and peace. Turkey is, at the same time, a significant agricultural machinery manufacturer and exporter.

Turkey has carried out many planned projects, such as the Southeastern Anatolia Project (G.A.P project) by relying on entirely national human and other resources. The program, which is globally one of a few mega projects with such a scale, includes 22 dams, 19 hydraulic power plants, and the irrigation of 1.82 million hectares of land. The total cost of the project is estimated at \$33 billion. The total installed capacity of power plants is 7,476 MW and projected annual energy production reaches 27 billion kWh. Consequently Turkey is experienced in such mega projects and ready to cooperate with the friendly South Sudan.

In service sector, Turkey is ready to share her knowledge and experience with the South Sudanese in the fields of tourism, finance, health, education and communications.

In my opinion, South Sudanese decision-makers and business people should bear in mind that the Turkish business people are tended to take more risks than their foreign peers and may easily adapt themselves to local conditions to meet local expectations. Thus, they make sort of ideal partners in countries where other foreign entrepreneurs are mostly hesitant.

Are there some areas where Turkish government find it hard not meeting their obligations?

The Republic of South Sudan is a newly independent country. The capacity-building process was affected negatively by the internal political strife in the past two and a half years. While the country faces formidable challenges in such a dire situation, political and military tension along with mutual distrust between government and opposition would take time to disappear and in the course of time, all goes back to normal. The parties understandably need time. Under these conditions, the government of the Republic of South Sudan will probably try to do its best to go ahead with capacity-building efforts and development of bilateral relations with other friendly nations to further capacity-building and development processes.

Please also talk about Turkey's development projects in the coming years...?

We are looking forward to completing the legal framework of our bilateral cooperation. As soon as the draft texts of the bilateral agreements which Turkey proposed are signed, Turkish-South Sudanese relations will gain an impetus in all areas. Development projects should be decided by both sides based on the needs of the country to be defined by the Government of the Republic of South Sudan. Turkey is not in a position to launch a project herself, as the Republic of South Sudan is an independent and sovereign state. Any project and program should start with the consent, cooperation and active participation of South Sudan. Turkey proposed to share her knowledge and experience with South Sudan in restructuring the South Sudanese healthcare sector. South Sudan gave her assent on the proposal. We expect a Turkish technical team from Turkey to review the situation in the health-care services sector and exchange views with their South Sudanese colleagues in this regard.

Is there anything about the relationship between the two countries or your experience in the embassy in South Sudan that I did not ask or touch on and be important to share?

Bilateral agreements will form the legal basis of our cooperation and signing them will offer opportunities to make official visits to explore potentials and challenges per possible cooperation area between the two nations. It is of great importance to boost our friendly relations by exchange of official visits at all levels. As the politicians, bureaucrats and technocrats meet with each other, new projects, ideas and proposals will come up. Both parties have the necessary political will to this end.