

# Sudan army denies responsibility for Malakal fighting

Friday 27 February 2009.

February 26, 2009 (KHARTOUM) — The Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) rejected any responsibility in causing the recent Malakal incidents saying it has no militia in the area and urged investigation into the issue.

Several dozen people died Tuesday in clashes in Malakal between a southern militia led by Gabriel Tang Ginye, who resides in Khartoum, and the South Sudan army, or Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA).

In the aftermath of the attack, Southern figures referred to the militia forces as SAF, since in fact Tang and all his forces were incorporated into Sudan's army in 2006. Indeed in a statement issued today, the spokesperson of the Sudanese army in Khartoum underlined that Tang's militia is now absorbed into the Sudanese army as agreed in the CPA and some of it are now deployed in Malakal as part of the Joint Integrated Units (JIUs) since November 2007.

So the SAF dismissed the "unfounded allegations" that Gen. Tang has militia in Malakal, whereas earlier reports had indicated that Tang's former forces rallied to him upon his arrival, including those in the JIU.

The statement insisted moreover that SAF has no militia in southern Sudan, adding that Gen. Tang is an officer in the army and he went to visit his family in Malakal.

SAF thus appears to be implying that the fighting in Malakal was strictly tribal in nature. At a press conference upon his reluctant return to Khartoum, Tang described the clashes as "tribal."

He said, "My problem is with Salva Kiir (the SPLA commander-in-chief) and the southern government, and the problem is between Dinka and Nuer; the Sudanese government has nothing to do with it." Some of the SPLA soldiers in Malakal are Dinka and some are Nuer; but according to Tang, all the commanders were Dinka.

Nothing prevented Tang's visit to the city according to the Sudanese constitution, said SAF, "which provides the freedom of movement."

Further downplaying the outcast status that Tang had earned for even worse

clashes in Malakal in 2006, the statement said there was no decision or judiciary warrant to arrest him.

The army also charged SPLA of violating the security arrangement in the CPA when it deployed troops from outside the town in order to arrest him. It also accused the SPLA of killing a large number of northern Sudanese in their homes and burning their property. Likewise, yesterday the government-sponsored Sudan Media Center reported that ten northern traders were among the dead.

"What happened in Malakal recently calls for the formation of a joint investigation commission because that the SPLA has lost control of his troops in the region," the statement words.

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