Oil exploration in Sudan continues despite major political changes. In Bentiu, one of the oil companies jumped on the euphoria train, celebrating the referendum outcome with Southerners, promising better life standards in the region.

The [White Nile Petroleum Operating Company (WNPOC)](http://www.wnpoc.com.sd/) organised an event on Thursday 3 March 2011, celebrating the overwhelming vote for the independence of Southern Sudan during January's referendum on secession. The celebrations took place at the company's main oil field Tharjath in Koch County, south of Bentiu, under the guiding theme “Together We Deliver”. The oil company promised to build a strong partnership with Southern Sudan, aiming at peace and development.

Farouk Gatkuoth, the Deputy Chairman of WNPOC said: "We cannot stand aside as a company operating in Southern Sudan, seeing the people celebrating the creation of a new nation. We want to celebrate together with the people of Southern Sudan, that is the main idea. We are very happy today that we have transformed this into reality."

The company WNPOC began operating in early 2001, well before the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed. WNPOC is mainly owned by Petronas, a Malaysian state-owned company. Petronas bought the company from Lundin, a Swedish company. During Lundin’s time, tens of thousands of people in the oil block south of Bentiu were driven from their homes by government forces and militias loyal to Major General Paulino Matip Nhial, who is now the now deputy commander-in-chief of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA).

Many returned to their homes after the CPA was signed and now complain that the oil waste water is polluting the area’s drinking water. They also say that almost none of the oil wealth has been used to develop their destroyed homeland.

During the celebration WNPOC promised to deliver services and development to the local people, particularly for the citizens of Unity State. "We will be there to support the state. We will add to all what we have done so far, increasing our energy and efforts for more production and community development”, Farouk Gatkuoth promised.

Mr. Kamis Hassan, a senior expert advisor for WNPOC from Malaysia, said that "there was doubt of violence erupting during the referendum exercise". In view of the peaceful referendum, he stressed that WNPOC will be sharing skills with both, northern and southern Sudanese.

The Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS), represented by Unity State Governor Taban Deng Gai, promised to keep strong relations with the Khartoum government. Taban Deng said that oil is now what binds the two sides together. "We will have future relations. There can be no Northern Sudan without Southern Sudan and vice-versa. We have a lot in common and one commonality is the oil, which is very central to both nations. Oil will continue to guide us and unite us serving the interest of both nations", he said.

The governor called upon young Southerners, who studied geology or oil production, to consider working in the South’s oil industry. He said that the government would reverse the policy from Khartoum requiring all oil employees to come from the North. The governor added that those [Northerners currently employed by the oil companies](http://www.sudanvotes.com/../articles/?id=512) will not lose their jobs, because their experience would assist the young new employees from the South.