June 26, 2013 (JUBA) - The US Ambassador to Juba, Susan Page said on Wednesday that companies from her country were interested in South Sudan’s oil, when asked about the subject at a press conference.

The American government helped negotiate the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between then government of Sudan and Southern rebels of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM), which allowed the South to secede in July 2011.

Ambassador Page disclosed that the US has donated $600 million to the new country in the last six years in aid to towards health, education and agriculture.

South Sudan’s oil industry is dominated by the companies that did deals with Khartoum before secession in 2011, with China, Malaysia and India besides France’s Total which holds a large but unexploited concession in Jonglei state.

Page pointed out that the US government does not "have oil companies as part of their machinery of the government" in the same way as other countries but said that among the US’s "independent" companies "there is a lot of interest oil and gas companies".

American companies were beginning to come to South Sudan, which she said was beginning to open up to more wider investment in the oil industry.

The SPLM government has "divided some of the blocks and sub-divided some of the blocks that have previously been granted and there is real interest in a number of American companies", the Ambassador said.

Many US companies are already operating in South Sudan in the field of exploration and logistics, she added.

In January 2012, South Sudan stopped oil production over a dispute with Khartoum, which appeared to have been resolved when export of Southern crude resumed earlier this year.

However, Sudan accused Juba of backing rebels north of the border and has threatened to stop oil production within two months it continues to harbour and support them.

Page noted that most international companies want to see a "stable and peaceful" environment before investing, pointing out that some of the blocks are in areas that "are not all that secured right now such as Jonglei state", where the military is fighting a rebel group which the South claims is backed by Khartoum.

Such issues are "going to be a concern for all big companies" she said but admitted that the "US would like to see more American companies here because they bring value and generally turn to have a more open and transparent process as well as making sure that they helped the communities where they engage."

South Sudan’s oil sector has been criticised in some quarters for lacking transparency by analysts and campaigning groups.

Page said encouraging the government to "abide by the contracts that have already been signed" would be a good thing "because that is very important for the people to know but also to allow for good deals if they can be made with American companies.”

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