A meeting to settle future arrangements for the sale of Southern Sudan’s oil after independence proved fruitless after the delegation representing the Juba government pulled out.

Garang Diing, Minister of Energy and Mining in the Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS), warned Khartoum of taking unilateral decisions in dealing with Sudan’s oil, 75% of which comes from the south.

“Whoever sells oil of Southern Sudan without permission is conducting an illegal business,” Garang said. “We are not given the right to market the oil after independence on 9 July in an official way, and that is why we decided to withdraw from the meeting.”

Garang spoke to reporters after returning from the meeting in Khartoum to strike a deal over future oil marketing policy. The disagreements between north and south remain unresolved.

However, the minister pledged a “continuous effort and commitment” to negotiate with Khartoum on oil issues before the south’s independence, saying further negotiations are scheduled in Ethiopia to discuss refineries and pipelines.

Khartoum has threatened to deprive Juba of the infrastructure managing the south’s oil resources if no deal is reached before Southern Sudan becomes independent in less than three weeks.

“We have sent a letter to South Sudan to inform them that they cannot use the pipelines, the refinery or the (Red Sea) port after July 9,” Finance Minister Ali Mahmoud told reporters, “unless we reach a deal about the price of renting this infrastructure.”

The stakes are high in what often resembles a thorny divorce settlement, with each side accusing the other of vengeful threats around the division of wealth.

The north, widely blamed for the current fuel shortages crippling the south, faces an economic crisis when its main source of revenue, southern oil, disappears without some kind of deal with Juba.

The south, which voted overwhelmingly for independence in January, had rarely benefited from Sudan’s oil income, which historically flowed north.

The region’s crude oil output is between 470,000 and 500,000 barrels per day.

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