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# Media Monitoring Report

United Nations Mission in Sudan/ Public Information Office

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# Highlights

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## **SPLM withdraws Arman, opposition to discuss election boycott today**

Members of the National Consensus Alliance met yesterday and decided to hold another meeting today to adopt a final position on the upcoming elections, *Al-Sahafa* reports. Reportedly, the alliance has already decided to boycott elections and the decision will be made public today. In a statement issued following the alliance meeting, the opposition parties have condemned the linking by the NCP between elections and referendum and demanded the postponement of the process. The SPLM withdrawal from the national presidential race has reportedly embarrassed the opposition.

## **Postponement of Presidency meeting left parties more skeptic**

National Reforms Party Secretary General who is also candidate for governor of Khartoum state Yahia Zakaria has said that the postponement of the Presidency meeting has left the political parties more suspicious about the forthcoming elections, *Al-Khartoum* reports. He said the meeting was supposed to discuss important issues particularly the postponement of elections. "The parties are disappointed by the postponement of the Presidency meeting," he said.

## **Opposition stunned by Arman's withdrawal**

*Sudan Tribune website* 31/3/10 — The Sudanese opposition reacted with anger and surprise after the ex-Southern rebel group decided to pull its presidential candidate leaving them feeling betrayed as speculations raged on a secret deal with the ruling party.

Earlier today the SPLM announced that it pulled its candidate for the post of the country's president in the upcoming presidential elections scheduled for 11th April. The decision to withdraw the candidacy of Yasir Arman was reached in Juba, during the party's Political Bureau extraordinary meeting which took place on Wednesday.

GoSS VP Riek Machar said the party arrived at the decision to withdraw Arman because it did not want to give legitimacy to the incumbent President Omer Al-Bashir of the NCP who runs for re-election.

Arman's withdrawal means Bashir is assured of re-election in the first round of voting, unless the opposition parties, which meet on Thursday to decide whether to boycott the election, can come up with a single candidate.

Machar added that the SPLM will participate in the elections at all other levels of Government with the exception of Darfur and Southern Kordofan, particularly in its parliamentary elections.

However, Arman in an interview with the Qatar based Al-Jazeera TV today expressed confidence that other parties will also boycott the elections and suggested that SPLM may extend its non-participation to other parts of North Sudan.

Machar said the SPLM will be in consultation with other political forces and decide how best to carry on with the presidential elections, adding that the withdrawal of Arman did not mean the party had confirmed President Bashir's candidacy.

The SPLM VP who traveled back to Khartoum on Wednesday evening following the Bureau's meeting further added that dialogue could continue with the other political parties over the

issues that caused the petition of the opposition parties to the Presidency.

It is not clear whether or not some or all the opposition parties will reconsider their position about the postponement of the elections and accept to participate in it.

But opposition parties appeared unhappy about the unilateral SPLM decision and hinting that it was done in coordination with the NCP for fear of the latter placing hurdles before the 2011 referendum.

"This is a betrayal by the SPLM of its agreement with the opposition forces," said Kamal Omer from the PCP to Reuters, adding the party would not be boycotting the polls.

Sideeg Yousuf from the Communist Party said he was surprised by the unilateral announcement, which he called "rushed."

"The SPLM and all the political forces agreed that they would make their position in consensus at a meeting tomorrow [Thursday]," he told Reuters. But he added he hoped the parties would still all meet.

Fouad Hikmat, from the International Crisis Group (ICG) think tank, said the SPLM had struck a deal with the NCP to allow Bashir to win the presidency. "The SPLM have decided to not [fully] boycott the elections because they don't want to jeopardize the referendum — that is very important to them."

Bashir had told a political rally in Damazin, the capital of the Blue Nile state: "The elections will not be postponed or cancelled. They will take place on time." Our partner (in the government), the SPLM, agrees with us," he added but did not elaborate.

### **Arman says no secret deal with NCP for withdrawal of candidate**

SPLM Spokesperson Yien Mathew has revealed that the decision to withdraw SPLM candidate from the race for president was taken at the meeting of the SPLM Leadership Bureau held in Juba yesterday, *Al-Khartoum* reports. The SPLM, he said, had decided not to run for the presidency while Darfur still suffers from war.

Arman himself told *Al-Jazeera* earlier that the SPLM withdrew from the race for president because of irregularities by the NCP in the process. He denied any secret deal with the NCP on the elections and assured that the SPLM will participate in the elections in southern Sudan and will continue to support the opposition.

### **Challenger in Sudan elections quits**

The *New York Times* 1/4/10 - The sudden withdrawal on Wednesday night of the leading challenger in Sudan's imminent presidential election has cast a cloud of uncertainty over the vote and almost instantly raised the prospect for violence.

Yasir Arman, who was the candidate of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement, the leading opposition group, announced on Wednesday that he was dropping out because, he said, it was "impossible" to hold an election in Darfur and that the whole process was "rigged."

However, he said that his party, which fought a long and bloody war against Sudan's government, would participate in the parliamentary and local elections across the country, except for the conflict-wracked Darfur region. This partial boycott of the election, which is scheduled to begin April 11 and has been billed as the first meaningful vote in Sudan in more

than 20 years, has left observers perplexed about what will happen next.

"This one still not very clear," one American official wrote in an e-mail Wednesday night. However, the official, who was not authorized to be quoted, said, "The message from Washington and others is ensure the elections are free and fair and deal with the electoral obstacles but move forward with the elections."

Several human rights groups have complained that the election is shaping up into a sham because Sudan's ruling party has intimidated and tortured opponents, skewed the census in the ruling party's favor, manipulated the media to essentially neuter any viable opposition, and used state money to bribe local chiefs.

Because of these rising concerns, some Western election observers recently advised the Sudanese government to postpone the vote. That prompted Sudan's president, Omar Hassan al-Bashir, who has been indicted on crimes against humanity for the bloodshed in Darfur, to threaten to cut off the election observers' fingers.

Sudan is a tightly controlled police state and few believed these elections would be a shining example of democracy. But the real risk to the country's stability — and the stability of the wider East Africa region — is a planned referendum for early next year in which southern Sudanese will vote on whether to split off and form their own country. If that referendum is tampered with, many analysts say, it could be a recipe for a major war.

Despite all the media attention in recent years on the conflict in Darfur, which has claimed perhaps 300,000 lives, Darfur was a side show compared to Sudan's north-south war that raged on and off for decades and killed more than 2 million people.

Sudan is an extremely large and diverse country, and there has long been an explosive fault line between the Muslim north and the south, which is dominated by animist and Christian peoples. It was the American-backed peace treaty in 2005 that ended the north-south war which set in motion the upcoming elections and the southern independence referendum.

President Bashir has vowed to scuttle the referendum if the southerners boycott the election. "If they say there will be no elections, we will say there will be no referendum," he threatened at a rally on Monday.

Such talk is clearly dangerous, because both sides have been rapidly rearming themselves in preparation for another possible war. Recently, thousands of southerners have been killed in ethnic clashes which many Sudan analysts believe are fueled by the north.

On Wednesday, Pagan Amum, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement's secretary general, told The Associated Press that President Bashir's threats are "unacceptable." "Self-determination was not a gift," Mr. Amum said. "The southern Sudanese people have the capacity to defend themselves and their referendum."

### **Sudan criticizes EU ban on its airlines**

**Sudan Tribune website** 31/3/10— The Sudanese civil aviation authority described as "unprofessional" a decision by the European Union (EU) to ban all airlines in the country from entering the region's airspace citing safety concerns.

Yesterday the European Commission which manages the airline "blacklist," said in a press release that it imposed "an operating ban on all operations of Sudanese air carriers, due to a

poor safety performance of the civil aviation authority of Sudan resulting from persistent non-compliance with international standards in the area of oversight".

But the acting Sudanese civil aviation administration director Al-Hafiz Abdullah said that there are no EU bound flights operating in Sudan.

Abdullah stressed that his agency adheres to the standards of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and outlined several changes introduced to the structure of the civil aviation administration and boosting budget allocated to air safety.

Sudan Airways says because of US sanctions imposed on Sudan it has been unable to receive spare parts and training for its planes. However, the US says it is prepared to make exceptions for humanitarian reasons upon request.

### **Egypt to dispatch 20 election observers to Sudan**

Government of Egypt decided to send 20 election observers to take part in monitoring Sudan's elections, *Al-Sahafa* reports. A press release by the Egyptian Embassy in Khartoum stated that the dispatch of the observers is being coordinated with the NEC.

### **Police will deploy to secure elections – Gen. Tohami**

In a lengthy interview, Elections Securing Committee Chairman Maj. Gen. (police) Ahmed Imam Al-Tohami said that a large number of police personnel would be deployed to secure elections, adding the police forces have been prepared for all eventualities, *Al-Watan* reports. According to the paper, Gen. Al-Tohami said UNMIS troops are not involved in process of securing the elections.

### **Bashir says he has a special dream for Unity state**

*Sudan Tribune website* 31/03/10 - Addressing his party's supporters in the Sudan's oil rich Unity state at Bentiu Stadium, during his Tuesday campaign hunt for voters in the state, the incumbent President of the Republic, Omer Al-Bashir, promised to develop the area if re-elected.

He vowed that the state capital, Bentiu, would be raised to the level of Khartoum through infrastructural development if the state voted for his re-election.

Al-Bashir also promised that his re-elected government would establish Bentiu University; a pledge he made in his past visit to the state but could not begin to realize. Among many other promises, Al-Bashir also vowed to construct a tarmac road to link Unity State with the neighboring Southern Kordufan's capital, Kadugli.

"I have a special dream for this state and it is my hope that all of you will vote for the NCP," he told the crowd.

"This state is the center of the economy of Sudan and I spent most of my military time here," he told his supporters in reference to the state's vast oil resource and his memory of military activities in the area during the war.

### **US envoy in crisis talks after Sudan election pullout**

*Reuters* 1/4/10 - US Sudan envoy Scott Gration began crisis talks with political leaders in Khartoum on Thursday after the withdrawal of a presidential candidate threatened to undermine the credibility of coming elections.

Yasir Arman, the candidate for the south's dominant Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) pulled out of the race late on Wednesday, less than two weeks before voting, citing concerns over election fraud and insecurity in Darfur.

Opposition parties were due to meet later on Thursday to discuss whether to unite in boycotting the vote, a move that would seriously undermine what were supposed to be Sudan's first multi-party elections in 24 years.

Analysts said Arman's withdrawal effectively handed the presidential race to Bashir and could be part of a deal with his northern NCP to guarantee a referendum on southern independence also promised under the peace deal.

But Arman denied any deal, saying there was no point in participating in the April elections and that the NCP had already rigged them for Bashir to win. He urged the opposition to take the same stance as his SPLM party.

"I will encourage them (the opposition) not to give legitimacy to Bashir - to boycott the election especially in Darfur and the presidential election," he told Reuters.

He added the SPLM may still consider a full boycott in the rest of the north if the opposition decided to do so.

If the opposition also decided to boycott the presidential vote, it would derail any claim by Bashir to have been elected in a fully democratic process.

But continued participation in the parliamentary vote could give them some say over the passage of laws or any constitutional changes if they won a fair percentage of the 450 seat national assembly.

U.S. officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, confirmed Gration had flown to Khartoum in reaction to the SPLM move and was planning to shuttle between meetings with leading opposition and government figures.

On Wednesday a joint statement by Washington, Britain and Norway said they were "deeply concerned by reports of continued administrative and logistical (electoral) challenges, as well as restrictions on political freedoms".

But they said "irrespective of the outcome of elections", it was essential the January 2011 referendum go ahead on time.

## Other Highlights

### **Khartoum Court expel four foreigners over smuggling refugees to Israel**

Khartoum Court sentenced four foreigners to imprisonment on charge of involvement in smuggling refugees to Israel from a camp in Kassala, *Al-Ayyam* reports. The Court also ordered their expulsion after they have served the jail term but acquitted eight others for lack of evidence.

### **UNAMID chief, SLM leader keep talking about security and peace**

**Sudan Tribune website** 30/3/10 - The head of UNAMID Ibrahim Gambari met for the second time in Paris on Sunday 28 March with Abdel Wahid Al-Nur leader of the rebel of the Sudan

Liberation Movement to follow up their discussions on joint cooperation and peace process.

Gambari and Al-Nur met on 21 March for the first time in Paris where they pledged to work together in a way to facilitate UNAMID duties related to the protection of civilians and humanitarian assistance. There were no contacts between the two parties and the SLM-AW had blamed the restricted mandate of the hybrid operation.

Also, the rebel leader is not part of the peace process in Doha as he asks Khartoum to improve the security situation and to disarm the government militias before to engage talks for peace in the restive region of Darfur.

"The SLA-AW leader reiterated his commitment to peace if certain conditions on the ground were met and indicated that he would be willing to participate in the peace process anywhere, "even in Khartoum," if those conditions are met, particularly regarding the security of the people of Darfur," said a statement released by the UNAMID.