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Media Monitoring Report

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Referendum Watch

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Highlights

Polling ends, count begins

Akhir Lahza 16/1/11 – The SSRC announced yesterday the closure of all polling centres in the North, South and out-of-country centres and started the counting process.

SSRC member Gen. Kamal Ali Saleh revealed that percentage of voting in the South reached 87%, in the North it is 56% and out-of-country is 91.3%.

He said the Commission would be ready to release final results during the period from 7 to 14 February.

Percentage of voting in the South is 83%, in the North it is 53% and 91% abroad, SSRC says, according to *Al-Khartoum* 16/1/11.

Vote counting, sorting process takes off

Sudan Vision 16/1/11 - South Sudan Referendum Commission (SSRC) announced yesterday the wrap of the weeklong polling process and the start of the votes, counting and sorting process set to continue till next Monday.

SSRC statement says that vote results at district-level in south Sudan and committees centers in the North is to be announced on the 20th of the current month and final result of the vote is scheduled be announced after the challenges period that ends on the 14th Feb.

"According to the latest reports, voting percentages ranges between 73 - 88%," stated the commission and declared that percentage of participation was more than 80%.

'Last Friday, 3,135,000 people casted vote in the South (83% of total registered voters)' SSRC Chief, Prof. Mohammed Ibrahim Khalil told reporters in Juba, adding that 62,000 participated in the ballot casting process in the North (53%), while the turnout in the Diaspora reached 55,000 (91%) .

"These results are excellent with regard to the international standards," Khalil said, adding, "I have participated in the administration of many elections in this country, so, I can say that this referendum is the most peaceful, calm and best one."

Responding to a question on his expectations regarding the vote outcome, he hinted that it would be in favor of secession.

"If I were a politician, I would work in a better way for unity," he said winding of his speech.

Police says ready to secure release of referendum results

Al-Raed 16/1/11 – Director General of Police Force Lt. Gen. Hashim Osman Al-Hussein has announced the readiness of the police force to secure the phase of official release of the vote result, adding that polling was generally peaceful and police did not received any polling-related incident.

He said the police would continue to deploy so that the final results are announced in a peaceful atmosphere and praised the role of the media in reassuring civilians of the stability of the security situation.

180,000 southerners returned to the South from the North - UN

Al-Ayyam 16/1/11 – UN said yesterday that around 180,000 southern Sudanese returned to the South from the North since last November.

DSRSG/RC/HC Georg Charpentier said the number could increase to at least half a million by the end of the current year.

He told a press conference in Juba that about 180,000 southerners have returned to the South and between 500,000 to 600,000 are also expected to return to the South from various areas in the North.

National Security Adviser Gen. Salah Gosh warns SPLA against entering Abyei

Al-Ahdath 16/1/11 – National Security Adviser Gen. Salah Abdullah Gosh has warned the SPLA against serious consequence of entering Abyei territory.

Gen. Gosh, who directed the warning during a meeting with ex-president Jimmy Carter yesterday, said the Sudanese Government was convinced that Abyei is a northern territory. He said SPLM leaders hailing from Abyei had complicated the issue, adding that talks between the two partners on the dispute over the territory are continuing.

Mr. Carter, for his part, has raised the pending issues particularly the border demarcation and oil sharing.

UN chief calls for patience in Sudan

AFP 15/1/11 - UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon on Saturday urged the people and institutions of Sudan "to exercise patience and restraint" while officials count ballots to determine whether south Sudan gains independence.

"The Secretary-General congratulates all the people of Sudan for the display of wisdom, patience, and peaceful determination that has characterized the voting over the last week," Ban said through his spokesman, Martin Nesirky.

"He calls on the people and institutions of Sudan to exercise patience and restraint until the Southern Sudan Referendum Commission announces the final result of the referendum," he continued.

"He extends his gratitude to all donor countries whose contribution has facilitated the process and his appreciation to the observer groups that traveled throughout Sudan and overseas to assess the situation," Ban's spokesman said.

Final day of voting in S. Sudan's independence test

AP 15/1/11 - Voters in Southern Sudan began celebrating after the end of a weeklong independence referendum Saturday, a poll that is widely expected to lead to the creation of the world's newest country.

Officials and observers noted high turnout and praised the peaceful voting process. Results began trickling in immediately after polls closed Saturday evening. Almost everyone expects the south to vote overwhelmingly to break away from the north, cleaving one of Africa's larger nations in two.

In Juba, the southern capital, polling centers counted ballots as residents milled around on the streets. But residents said they already knew the outcome.

"I am very happy because we are going to get our independence," said Mary Atong, 45, a mother of four. "Bye bye, enough."

But in Khartoum, the northern capital, where many wish to see the country remain united, one polling station registered a nearly 60-percent vote for unity, and only 40 percent in favor of independence. Around two dozen observers oversaw the counting of the 126 ballots at the station.

Gen. Mustafa Abdullah, a referendum commission official, said it is no surprise that more southerners in the north vote for unity, because they don't want to disrupt their lives there.

"It will not affect the total result, because it will be separation definitely," he said.

Santino Riak, a public administration student at Juba University, said independence was due after the north and south fought a two-decade war that killed 2 million people before a 2005 peace agreement.

"We have lost many people in the war, but now we are smelling freedom, it is coming," he said.

Mohamed Ibrahim Khalil, the chairman of the south's referendum commission, said 83 percent of those registered in the south and 53 percent of those registered in the north had cast their votes. He also cited a 91 percent turnout rate among Sudanese voters in eight other countries. Officials had said there were some 3.9 million registered voters.

Khalil said he believed the referendum would be judged as "a good result by any international standard," noting that the commission set up the vote in four months.

"We have come a long way, making long strides to reach the stage where we are today," said Khalil, a lawyer from northern Sudan who is 90 years old.

He echoed predictions that the south would choose to split from the north.

"All indications show that the south will lean toward separation," he said, adding, "I don't derive any pleasure from announcing the splitting of Sudan in two ... on the contrary, I would rather have hoped the country would remain united." ...

South Sudan ends independence vote, awaits statehood

Reuters 15/1/11 - South Sudan's polling centres closed their doors on Saturday after a week-long vote on independence from the north that could end a vicious cycle of civil war with the creation of the world's newest state.

Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, leading a mission observing the vote, said turnout could reach 90 percent and that it seemed likely the south had voted for independence.

Exhausted polling staff processed a straggle of voters on the final day in the southern capital Juba. Some officials were so tired they were sleeping behind their dusty stalls.

"I feel relieved as this is what we've been fighting for 21 years," said southerner Ayen Deng. "We're waiting for the official results but we will be celebrating tonight."

Final results are due before Feb. 15 but could be announced as early as the beginning of next month. "Of course there will be independence, we can smell it," said Santino Riek.

Northern officials have appeared increasingly resigned to losing the oil-producing south -- which makes up a quarter of the country's land -- allaying fears conflict could reignite.

Carter, leading one of the largest observation missions, told reporters in Khartoum a handful of centres had reported 100 percent turnout and were already tallying the results.

"We already know that in the south there's been about an average of 90 percent (participation) from the stations we've observed and I think they are representative," Carter said.

In the few centres where he had seen counting under way, he said, the votes "were practically unanimous in favour of separation with only a few ballots to the contrary.

"It's highly likely that the referendum result will be in favour of separation," Carter said, but added that no one should prejudge the outcome.

Carter also said the vote had probably met international standards and Khartoum said it would recognise the result, meaning all southerners must do now is wait to celebrate their independence day, likely on July 9.

The former U.S. president played down threats of popular protests in the north following the vote.

"My hope is that the opposition parties in the north will be brought into consultations with President Al-Bashir's party and that they will prepare for modifications for the constitution," he said...

EU hails peaceful south Sudan vote

AFP 15/1/11 - EU chief diplomat Catherine Ashton welcomed Saturday the peaceful end of south Sudan's week-long vote on independence and said EU observers would give a preliminary assessment early next week.

"I would like to express my great satisfaction that the Southern Sudan Referendum was held on time and conducted peacefully," the European Union's high representative for foreign affairs said in a statement.

"The people of Southern Sudan turned out in large numbers to exercise, with patience and dignity, their right to vote on self-determination," she said.

"This was a historic event and a major milestone in implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), of which the European Union is a witness."

An EU observer mission led by European Parliament member Veronique de Keyser will issue a preliminary statement on Monday.

The final result, which will determine whether south Sudan secures recognition as the 193rd UN member state in July, is not expected before next month.

Ashton said she welcomed a commitment by Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir to respect the outcome of the referendum.

The EU is encouraged by public pledges made by Bashir and southern president Salva Kiir to continue negotiations on outstanding issues related to the 2005 peace agreement between the once-warring north and south regardless of the vote's outcome, she said.

"The EU stands ready to assist the parties further in ways they would consider helpful to achieve lasting peace and stability, in cooperation with other international partners," she said.

But Ashton also said she was "deeply concerned" about reports of clashes in Sudan's flashpoint Abyei district on the north-south border last weekend.

Feuding ethnic groups from the district held peace talks on Thursday after the violence, which left up to 38 people dead.

"I call upon the Sudanese parties to maintain calm and resolve this issue through peaceful dialogue," Ashton said.

N. Sudan ruling party says S. Sudan vote "broadly fair"

Reuters 14/1/11 - A senior north Sudanese official said on Friday the south's independence referendum was largely fair and his ruling party would accept the likely vote for secession.

"We are satisfied with the process and, as it has been declared by the President (Omar Hassan) Al-Bashir, we will respect the outcome of the referendum ... It will most likely be for secession," Ibrahim Ghandour, from the ruling National Congress Party (NCP), told Reuters in an interview.

The most conciliatory comments to date from Khartoum will ease political tension in the south, where some commentators had warned that the north might try to disrupt the vote in an effort to keep control of the south's oil reserves.

Ghandour, the NCP's secretary for political relations, said the vote was "broadly fair" despite

some reports of supporters of Sudanese unity being intimidated in remote areas of south Sudan's Bahr El-Ghazal states.

"I think till now the process is going smoothly. The most important thing is that it is going very, very peacefully ... I think it will meet with the standards required," he said.

"We still wait to see the final report of our observers as well as international observers."

He added: "If secession occurs we are ready to support a new state and we look forward to brotherly relations with our ex- citizens."

Sudan's ruling party wants Abyei to become "integrated area"

Al-Sahafa 15/1/11 - The National Congress Party's official responsible for the Abyei region Al-Dirdiri Muhammad Ahmad has said that his party is sticking to the proposal of transforming the disputed area of Abyei to become an integrated area by adding some improvements, considering the fact that the Abyei referendum had become impossible and the Dinka Ngok being granted dual citizenship.

Speaking to Al-Sahafah, Al-Dirdiri said that the conflict over Abyei could not be resolved without preserving the rights of the Misiriyah and the Dinka Ngok.

He accused the followers of Sudan People's Liberation Movement [SPLM] in Abyei of making the referendum for Abyei fail and affecting the SPLM's strategic relations with the north after the referendum.

He affirmed the importance of reaching a political solution that gives all parties their rights and avoids the area from sliding into war.

Opposition leader proposes solutions for Sudan's problems

Al-Sahafa 15/1/11 - The leader of the National Ummah Party's [NUP], Sadiq al-Mahdi has presented seven prescriptions for solving Sudan's problems. He described Sudan as being sick in bed.

The top prescription is a new constitution for north Sudan, solving the Darfur crisis, setting up freedoms and forming a national transitional government.

He said while addressing a crowd of people at Al-Jazirah yesterday, that the Salvation [ruling regime] took over Sudan one million square miles and was not confronted by cases of the International Criminal Court or the United Nations Security Council.

Sudan welcomes Tunisian people's choice in deciding "political future"

SUNA 16/1/11 - The government of Sudan has welcomed the choice made by the Tunisian people in deciding the political future of their homeland and that the popular change would be a national chance to achieve freedom, welfare, security and stability for the Tunisian people.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has said that it is closely monitoring the development of the situation in Tunisia and that the Sudan would continue to keep its good brotherly relations with Tunisian people and would respect their democratic choice.

Meanwhile, the official spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Khalid Musa, has stressed that all members of the Sudanese community in Tunisia and the members of the diplomatic corps are safe.

Interior Minister, JDB, South Kordofan leaders and Abyei Administration to hold a meeting tomorrow – says governor Haroun

Al-Ahdath 16/1/11 – Governor of Southern Kordofan state Ahmed Haroun has revealed that a meeting would be convened tomorrow between the interior minister Ibrahim Mahmoud Hamid, JDB, southern Kordofan leaders and Abyei Administration to address security challenges in the territory to pave the way for a political settlement of the dispute between the Misseriya and the Dinka.

Haroun, who was speaking to the Blue Nile TV yesterday, indicated the security, political and societal complications in the area, adding that success of societal and security tracks would pave the way for reaching a political solution in the area.

Sudanese Diaspora in Europe vote for secession

BBC News 16/1/11 - The first official count of Sudan's referendum has been announced, with the country's Diaspora in Europe overwhelmingly voting for secession.

Voters cheered as the results declared that more than 97% of the 640 voters had been in favour of a new state.

Full results of the vote - which ended on Saturday after a week-long poll - are not expected until next month.

The vote is widely expected to see the south choose for separation from the north. In a hall opposite parliament in London where the count was taking place, votes were held up one by one and placed in piles: Secession, Unity, Unmarked or Invalid.

Voters had made an often long and expensive journey to Britain to exercise their choice.

Finally, just before midnight, the official in charge of the polling station, Federico Vuni, read out the results.

"I hereby announce the results of this polling station in the referendum of (on) the future status of Sudan," he said.

"Number of invalid ballots: zero; number of unmarked ballots: one; number of votes for unity: 13; number of votes for secession: 626".

Men and women embraced, they danced, they waved the flag of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) - the rebel movement that had fought so long for this moment.

If this result is any indication of the wider southern Sudanese community, it will not be long before Sudan is divided - and a new state emerges in the south.

Roots of bitterness in a region threaten Sudan's future

By JEFFREY GETTLEMAN – NY Times 16 January 2011

ABYEI, Sudan — There is a place in Sudan where Africa and the Arab world meet, where one thatched roof hut carries a roughly-hewn cross at the top and next door an identical hut flaunts a crescent moon, where heavily armed nomads sweep in for raids and heavily armed villagers fight back.

It is the most contested, the most emotionally charged and, recently, the most violent piece of land in this country of nearly one million square miles. As southern Sudan's historic independence referendum came to a close on Saturday, this nation is rapidly preparing to split in half and the focus is shifting here.

Abyei has oil. It has fertile land. It straddles the disputed border between north and south Sudan, and it is crawling with militias, which have clashed in recent days, killing dozens. Two rival ethnic groups claim the right to belong here — the Misseriya, who are Arab nomads, and the Ngok Dinka, sub-Saharan cattle herders — and the bitterness between them is long and deep.

“Hyena and Misseriya,” said Kuol Alor Kuol, a 72-year-old Dinka man with foggy glasses, about why he was sauntering down Abyei's main road with a fully loaded Kalashnikov. “They're trying to take what I have.”

Most people here seem armed to the teeth. Out on the front line, in half-deserted villages of crushed mud huts and endless yellow grass, a young Dinka man in a tank top lounged at a police post, an assault rifle in his hands. Around him were teenagers in shorts and flip-flops, clutching cheap automatic weapons.

“There are no civilians here,” said John Ajang, the acting secretary general of Abyei's local government.

Busloads of southerners heading home through Misseriya areas are routinely sprayed with gunfire. Several passengers have been killed. Roads are closing and many Misseriya are fleeing, fearing retaliation. United Nations officials said they saw large crowds of Misseriya men, armed with assault rifles, rocket-propelled grenades and machetes, amassing north of the town of Abyei. United Nations officials also crossed paths with Abyei police officers driving a truck with bound prisoners and three dead bodies in it.

The independence referendum itself has gone exceedingly well, with high, jubilant turnout and orderly voting, showing that southern Sudan, one of the poorest places on earth, where more than three-quarters of adults cannot read, could step up for such a historic moment. Votes will be counted over the next two weeks, and the referendum is likely to pass, with the southern third of Sudan forming its own independent nation in July.

But the 1,250-mile border between the north and the south has yet to be demarcated, and the two sides have to decide how to share the oil; while most of it lies in the south, the south is landlocked and the north has the pipeline to the Red Sea. The two sides fought one of Africa's longest civil wars, which killed more than two million people. Much of the violence was meted out by proxy forces and ethnic-based militias.

This is why Abyei is so worrisome, because so many of the ingredients of the wider north-south war — the oil, the proxy forces, the historic rivalries — are distilled here. “The coming conflict will be set off from Abyei,” predicted Mohammed Hamad, a political science professor in Khartoum.

It is not easy drawing a line through this country. Both north and south Sudan claim Abyei as their own. In Sudan, the extremes may be clear, with Arabs in the upper north, and Christian and animist people in the deep south. But the middle, as Abyei shows, is a tapestry.

Many men in Abyei wear Arab-style robes and even natty, impossibly white Muslim prayer caps — but they are not Muslim. Decades ago, the Dinka here aligned themselves to the Arab north in the hope that they would be better protected from slave raiders and would go to better schools.

But the Misseriya see Abyei as a special place, too, a rich pastureland to graze their cattle during the dry season, which they have been doing since time immemorial. The biggest waterway here, known in the south as the Kiir River, is so vital to the Misseriya that they have laid claim to it, calling it Bahr al-Arab, or River of the Arabs.

Still, the Dinka are the vast majority in Abyei, and though they may have fared slightly better than other Dinka elsewhere, they were also oppressed by the north and now want to join the south.

“We will go to war over this,” said Rou Minyiel Rou, a veterinarian in Abyei. “This is about land, and we can’t compromise on land.”

In 2005, when the United States and others pushed the north and the south to sign the comprehensive peace treaty that set the referendum in motion, the two sides dug in over Abyei. So the negotiators set up a special joint administrative area for Abyei, which encompasses several thousand square miles, most of it swamp and scrub brush, and about 150,000 people.

That administration never got off the ground because of mistrust. In May 2008, tensions spiked. Militias attacked police posts, clashes erupted in the town of Abyei, and northern and southern regular forces piled in. The market was flattened and more than 200 people were killed — Dinka and Misseriya. A mass grave marked by a few sticks and lumps of gravel lies on the outskirts of town.

Many people say the recent fighting is heading down the same destructive path. In the past 10 days, Misseriya militias have fiercely clashed with Dinka civilians; while the local police are backing up the Dinka, southern officials say the northern army is arming and training the Misseriya, which the Misseriya deny.

“Why would we attack now?” asked Sadig Babo Nimir, a Misseriya leader. “We are ready to host the Dinka as we did before.”

He accused the southern government of dressing up soldiers as police officers and sending them into Abyei in contravention of the 2005 peace treaty, an accusation that Western officials in Sudan say is probably true. It seems that both sides are jockeying for position, trying to seize control of various patches of Abyei, before a final border settlement is struck.

Complicating matters, said Mr. Hamad, the political science professor, was that while the heavily armed Misseriya were aligned with the north, “Sudan has always been a place where the center has no control over the periphery,” especially when the agendas diverge, so it may be difficult now for the northern government to reel in the Misseriya.

A separate referendum to determine whether Abyei belongs to the north or south was put off indefinitely last month because the north and south could not agree on who could vote in it.

The southern government is also getting increasingly fed up with the United Nations peacekeepers mandated to patrol Abyei. “The U.N. are supposed to keep peace,” said Col. Philip Aguer, a southern military spokesman. “But they are not keeping any peace. They are just enjoying themselves, eating fat salaries.”

United Nations officials say they have recently increased air and land patrols. United Nations officials here also took the surprising step of flying in Ahmed Haroun, a Sudanese official who has been indicted by the International Criminal Court on war crimes charges surrounding the atrocities in Darfur, for a meeting with Abyei elders. Mr. Haroun, who used to be a minister in the northern government, is now the governor of the state of Southern Kordofan, just north of Abyei, which is also haunted by various militias and is combustible itself.

The meeting culminated in an agreement to better regulate the Misseriya migration and pay compensation for victims of the clashes.

But few think that will help.

“Share Abyei with the Misseriya?” said Ngor Agok Deng, a Dinka elder, laughing. “I won’t even share a meal with the Misseriya.”

Josh Kron contributed reporting.

Other Highlights

Prominent native administrator killed in southern Kordofan last Friday

Al-Rai Al-Aam 16/1/11 – an unidentified group killed last Friday an SPLM leader and native administrator Abdul Karim yagoub in Al-Rashad area in southern Kordofan state. The group rained bullets on the leader at his residence. Yagoub is a famous native administrator in the region.

SPLM said the incident took place at a time when pro-NCP militias are being armed in the area.

US official: Sudan not helping rebel leader Kony

AP 14/1/11 - A Ugandan official says the leader of the brutal rebel group the Lord's Resistance Army has crossed back into Congo from Sudan.

U.S. State Department official Karl Wycoff, meanwhile, said Friday he has seen no evidence Sudan was helping rebel leader Joseph Kony.

Ugandan army spokesman Felix Kulayigye says Kony entered the Darfur region of Sudan in October but has since returned to Congo. Ugandan officials worried Kony may have been receiving support from Sudan's capital.

Khartoum once backed Kony but severed the relationship in 2005, when north and south Sudan signed a peace deal.

The LRA began its attacks in Uganda more than 20 years ago. Kony is wanted by the International Criminal Court under a 2005 warrant for crimes against humanity in Uganda.

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