



**TEXT OF A PRESS CONFERENCE BY DR. VICTOR TONCHI, HEAD OF THE  
AFRICAN UNION OBSERVER MISSION TO THE SOUTHERN SUDAN  
REFERENDUM, HELD IN JUBA,**

**12 JANUARY 2011**

**Ladies and Gentlemen of the Media,**

I have the honour and privilege to welcome you all to this event. As you may be aware, the African Union Observer Mission was dispatched by H.E Jean Ping, Chairperson of the Commission of the African Union (AU), to Sudan, in response to the invitation of the Southern Sudan Referendum Commission (SSRC). Accordingly, our Mission arrived in the Sudan on 03 January 2011

The AU has a team of 110 members drawn from National Electoral Commissions, National Parliaments, the Pan-African Parliament (PAP), the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOC) of the AU, Regional Legislative Assemblies and Regional Economic Communities (RECs), Ambassadors, prominent individuals, and members of civil societies of member states. These members have been deployed to various parts of the country where the referendum is being conducted.

The AU is pleased to note that it has been at the forefront in driving the peace process in Sudan through the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). The current Referendum is a component of and in conformity with the CPA. Referenda are uncommon events in most nations; however, they should be seen as necessary aspects of freedom of choice and democracy.

We are, so far, impressed with the level of preparedness, conduct and logistic support offered by the SSRC. Reports from our Observers in the field, so far, suggest massive turnout especially in many states in Southern Sudan. The process has so far been transparent. The elderly, physically challenged and nursing mothers have been given priority during voting. Indeed, we are pleased to note that the voting process has been smooth. We have not received from our Observers in the field, so far, any information of major deficiencies or shortcomings in the voting process. The Mission welcomes the impressive turnout of female voters and in their recruitment in conducting the referendum. We have also noted with satisfaction that voting time has been extended from 5pm to 6pm.

Efforts must be made to ensure that people, especially in the rural areas, are not disenfranchised on account of long queues, long distance to polling centers, and/or inability to read in English or Arabic. We urge that the SSRC staff at the polling centers should continue to provide assistance to voters, whenever needed, without compromising the integrity of their vote.

Obviously, one key challenge of this exercise will be security concerns. We are confident that the Sudanese government and the Government of Southern Sudan (GOSS) are jointly finding ways and means to guarantee a peaceful environment. We call upon the media to continue to be objective and professional in reporting on the referendum process.

Our objective in Sudan, which we believe is shared by all, is to ensure an inclusive process and that voting took place in a free and fair atmosphere. Our interest and mandate is not with the outcome of the referendum in Southern Sudan, but with peace and the deepening of democracy.

I thank you for your attention.

**Dr. Victor Tonchi**

**Head, the AU Observer Mission**

**12 January 2011**

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