

## **PRESS STATEMENT**

*April 17, 2010*

### **Summary**

Based upon the data and observations of Cordoba Initiative's small election observer mission, preliminary evidence is that the April 2010 elections in the three areas observed (Khartoum, Juba, and El-Fasher) did not meet international standards. However, given the challenges posed by the first multiparty elections in 24 years in a large, developing nation with little electoral experience and a recent history of conflict, it would have been, frankly, unrealistic to expect such a result.

Nevertheless, the voting was an important event not only for Sudan but for the broader international community. In addition to an important step in successful implementation of the CPA, it also marks a shift in power structures within Sudan. While there were problems, most notably of a logistical or technical nature, some aspects of the process, notably the ability of Sudanese voters to come with a complex, multi-ballot voting process, exceeded expectations. Many stakeholder groups, including voters, poll station staff, local observers and political party agents deserve credit for their roll in the voting process.

Additionally, interview data suggest the Sudanese people are enthusiastic about their experience with elections and believe that democracy has significant potential to bring peace, increase freedoms, and bring material improvement in their lives.

### **Mandate and Methodology**

This is Cordoba Initiative's first international elections observations missions. As such, it was necessarily small in nature. Reflecting these logistical considerations, observer activities were centered around three electorally significant urban centers: Khartoum, Juba, and El-Fasher.

In addition to observers' traditional concern with process and procedure, CI also gave its observers a mandate to conduct extensive interviews with voters, polling staff, local observers, political party agents and other

stakeholders. These interviews focused on attitudes and experiences with elections, what interviewers hoped could be accomplished with elections, attitudes towards a variety of issues confronting Sudan, and how elections might impact relations between stakeholders. In addition to furthering CI's core mission of promoting understanding and constructive interaction between the Islamic world and the West, CI felt that this mandate to gather broader qualitative data about Sudanese experiences and attitudes would allow CI to make a meaningful contribution to dialogue even with a small mission.

Over the course of five days of voting, CI observation teams visited approximately 75 polling stations and gathered data from approximately 150 interviews with voters or other stakeholders.

### **Caveat**

CI's commentary reflects observations made and data gathered only those areas in which CI observers were active. Furthermore, remarks at this time address only the voting process itself. They do not reflect pre-election conditions or those elements ongoing or in the future, such as ballot counting, announcing results, and the postelection environment. While it is too early to make a formal analysis, there are important indicators that guide our thinking.

### **Preliminary Observations**

#### *Successes*

One of the most obvious and important of the voting period's successes is that it took place in a generally peaceful and orderly climate.

Another important success was the smoothness of the voting process itself. With 8 separate ballots in the North and 12 in the South, many had worried that the process was too complex for first time, and often illiterate, voters. Instead, CI observers did not report a single incident or complaint regarding the complexity of the process. Observed voters in Khartoum took an average of only 8 minutes to complete voting and 12 minutes, with more ballots, in Juba.

While CI observers witnessed or reported problems with individual poll workers, observers' general comments on Sudanese poll workers were very positive, reflecting more than satisfactory levels of professionalism, helpfulness and understanding of procedures and protocols. Observers witnessed several instances of poll staff identifying problems and implementing resourceful solutions on their own, including adding curtains to increase voting booth privacy and producing signs to explain procedure to voters.

Observers were also generally complimentary of the role of other stakeholders in the process including polling station staff, local observers, and political party agents.

CI also noted the important role played by women throughout the electoral process, considering this an important success for Sudanese society. High levels of enthusiasm reported among younger interviewees were also viewed as very positive.

### *Challenges*

The most significant problem detailed by CI observers involved the names of registered voters not appearing on the final voting lists at polling stations. This phenomena was reported multiple times by CI observers in all three areas. It was particularly disruptive because the current election system provided no mechanism for recourse to affected voters.

There were also widespread logistical problems with the election, especially in South Sudan – where some polling stations still had not been delivered ballots by the second day of voting. Among the most frequent logistical issues including: ballots being delivered late, wrong ballots being delivered, candidates being omitted from ballots at particular stations, and voting lists not being delivered. The National Elections Commission extended the voting period by two days to help mitigate these problems.

CI observers also recorded a number of incidents of a more significant nature, either witnessed by observers or alleged by interviewees.

- Multiple physical altercations and two possible arrests at a polling station Khartoum.

- Observers in Juba witnessed two cases of an illiterate voter being told for whom to vote.
- Poll workers in El-Fasher told CI observers they had uncovered evidence of ballot box tampering (as a corrective, poll workers burned the ballots in the box, and called voters back to revote).
- An alleged incident of multiple voting that was not addressed.
- Allegations of under-aged voting.

### *Interviewee Data*

Interview data reveals a high level of enthusiasm for elections and democracy among the Sudanese people. Comments about their attitudes towards elections were typically very positive in nature. Typical interviewees view elections as a means to political empowerment and material benefit. For interviewees in Darfur, peace was also a significant goal of elections. However, interviewees were often less clear about the specifics of what empowerment, material advancement, or peace meant in the context of elections or how it would be achieved.

Interestingly, many interviewees believed that elections would bring positive change even if incumbents were elected. This was expressed in terms of a change in power dynamic in which incumbents would now owe their positions to voters.

### **Conclusions**

In spite of liabilities, this was a historically significant election, marking a vital milestone toward successful implementation of the CPA and a potential turning point in Sudan's history.

Given the broader factors against which the election occurred, a large, developing nation, with little electoral experience, and a recent history of conflict, it would be unrealistic to expect the April 2010 to comply with international norms. Elections included systemic difficulties such as registered voters not appearing on voter lists and polling stations and a host of logistical difficulties, among other problems.

However, they have put Sudan on a road that could lead to future democratic success. In spite of predictions to the contrary, the system did not seem to complex for most voters. As a whole, polling station staff were well trained

and diligent. Other stakeholders, such as local observers and political party agents, performed well.

Perhaps most impressive were the Sudanese voters themselves. In spite of well publicized difficulties, CI observers found a significant appetite for democracy and what elections can bring to them as individuals and as a society. It is important that all stakeholders in Sudan work together to apply the lessons of this election. Next time, the Sudanese people's expectations will be much higher.