

Introductory Remarks by

President Pierre Buyoya

African Union High-Level Implementation Panel for

Sudan

Summit Meeting of Political Parties in Southern Sudan

1 March 2010

Your Excellencies,

First Vice President of the Republic of Sudan and President of the
Government of Southern Sudan, Salva Kiir Mayardit

Vice President of the Government of Southern Sudan Riek Machar Teny

Leaders of the Political Parties in Southern Sudan

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Members of civil society

It is an honour and a responsibility to open this Summit Meeting of Political Parties in southern Sudan. It is truly a privilege to be here. The people of southern Sudan have struggled for more than fifty years to be able to exercise their democratic rights. Until today there has never been an election in which all southern Sudanese can vote freely and fairly.

These coming elections are without doubt a milestone in the achievement of justice and democracy for the people of southern Sudan.

I would like to pass a message from the Chairman of the African Union Panel, President Thabo Mbeki. He was especially looking forward to this Summit and wanted very much to be here, but for reasons beyond his control he is unable to join us today. He sends his deepest regrets and a strong message of solidarity.

I must also pass a message of regrets from my fellow Panelist, President Abdusalami Abubaker. He is also serving as the ECOWAS Mediator for Niger, and those duties have made it impossible for him to join us on this trip.

Mr. President, you and many others in the SPLA fought for 21 years to see the day when your people would be able to exercise this democratic right. We know the immense suffering that the people of southern Sudan have undergone in order to win this right. And we must take a moment to

remember the many of our brothers and sisters who did not live to see this historic moment.

Especially we must honour the memory of the late Dr John Garang de Mabior. Let me salute his courage, his leadership, and his vision, which continue to inspire us all.

The elections which will be held next month mark a pivotal moment in the life of the Sudanese nation as a whole. Sudan has a long and proud history of free and fair multiparty elections, and this election revives that tradition. But no Sudanese election has ever been inclusive, because due to civil war, many southern Sudanese citizens were previously unable to vote. The periods of elected government in this country were never true democracies, because the war continued in southern Sudan.

Now, for the first time since 1956, all southern Sudanese will enjoy the opportunity to exercise their democratic rights as citizens.

I congratulate the people of southern Sudan on this magnificent achievement.

During the long years of war, the people of southern Sudan demonstrated that they could never be ruled against their will, and that the destiny of southern Sudan lies in the hands of the people of southern Sudan. This election will be a milestone in making that a reality.

The national elections are a major pillar of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. It is through democratic participation that the peace agreement becomes truly owned by the citizens of Sudan, and therefore truly national and truly comprehensive.

These national elections are held just nine months before the people of southern Sudan will be voting to exercise their right of self-determination. These elections are an important step towards the fulfillment of that central pillar of the CPA. Under whatever sovereign arrangement they choose, the Sudanese people have fundamental democratic rights. If the people of southern Sudan vote for unity, then surely the unity they desire will be based on democracy. Should they vote for secession, then it is vitally important that the two successor states should be founded upon democracy.

Mr. President,

We are here as Africans, in a spirit of solidarity and brotherhood. We do not come as intruders, not as outsiders who come to dictate to you what you must do. On the contrary, we are convening this Summit Meeting in response to the request of Sudanese political parties to assist in their collective efforts to achieve what we all believe is best for your people.

We began our work in Sudan eleven months ago as the African Union High Level Panel on Darfur. We were mandated by the African Union Peace and Security Council to examine how best to achieve peace, justice and reconciliation in Darfur.

During our extensive consultations with the people of Darfur, we were struck both by the hunger for peace and for the demand that Darfurians should be able to participate fully as Sudanese citizens in the democratic governance of their country. We defined the crisis as the Sudanese crisis in Darfur, and concluded that Darfur's crisis could be resolved only in the framework of a national democratic transformation.

Our Report was widely welcomed and endorsed by Sudanese people across the political spectrum.

The Report was accepted by the Peace and Security Council in October, which then gave the Panel a new mandate, for a further twelve months, in the form of the African Union High Level Implementation Panel for Sudan. While the main thrust of the recommendations of our Report focused on what the parties should negotiate, we also identified a series of specific steps that the Government of Sudan should undertake unilaterally to meet its obligations towards those Sudanese citizens who live in Darfur.

We identified free, fair and inclusive elections as a necessary precondition for the resolution of the conflict in Darfur. To that end, we recommended

that everything possible should be done to ensure that Darfurians have the opportunity to vote in such an election. At the same time, we did not consider that elections alone would be a sufficient condition for resolving the Sudanese crisis in Darfur. There are still vital issues to be negotiated and agreed among the parties to the conflict.

Darfur must be part of a free and fair national election. But let us also be clear that a free and fair national election does not, in itself, provide a solution to the conflict in Darfur.

We are happy with the important steps taken towards a peace agreement for Darfur in N'djamena and Doha over the last weeks. We fully support the efforts to bring these negotiations to a rapid and successful conclusion.

Our new mandate, given to us by the African Union in October, covers not only Darfur but the whole of Sudan, focusing on the successful implementation of the CPA.

My brothers and sisters in southern Sudan

The challenges of building democracy and development from the ashes of war are great indeed. But in our visits to Juba it is clearly evident that the people of southern Sudan, and their leaders, are making enormous strides in putting aside the suffering of the past to build a brighter future.

Holding free and fair elections after so many decades of division and destruction is a huge task. The columns of newspapers are filled with the writings of sceptics who say that it cannot be done.

Those sceptics are wrong. It can be done. It was done in my country, Burundi. It was done in the country of the Chairman of our Panel, President Thabo Mbeki. It can be done here.

Our objective in today's Summit Meeting is to consolidate the foundations for a fair and free election. We aim to do this through adopting an Electoral Code of Conduct for all political parties competing in the election, supported by a Declaration of Common Commitment to underlying principles of democratic transformation.

The Electoral Code of Conduct we shall be adopting tomorrow has the purpose of making the election campaign a fair and equal contest, such that the voters can exercise their free choice. The Code draws upon the efforts of different Sudanese institutions and parties, and also reflects the experience of many countries around the world, both those that have long democratic traditions and those which have only recently transitioned from conflict or one party rule to a democratic system. The Code of Conduct includes details on the specific dos and don'ts for parties during the campaign – how they are to remain free from incitement and personal abuse, how access to the media is to be regulated, how they should give

notice to the local authorities before holding a rally, but not need to ask permission from them, and so forth.

An important aspect of the Electoral Code of Conduct is the role of election observers. The coming election in Sudan will be one of the most closely scrutinized in the world, as well as being the most intensely watched electoral contest in Sudanese history. The African Union will be sending a team of observers, not only for polling day, but to monitor the campaign as well. Part of the function of the observer team is to support the mechanisms for receiving complaints and adjudicating disputes.

The Declaration of Common Commitment serves a specific and different purpose. It addresses the wider context of the general elections in Sudan. These elections will lead to the formation of a new National Government in Khartoum and a new Government of Southern Sudan.

These elections take place at an important moment in the implementation of the CPA. But only two of the competing parties are signatories to the CPA. We have heard from some Sudanese parties just how important it is that the new governments proceed with faithfully implementing the remaining provisions of the CPA. They suggested that the parties make a commitment to the CPA implementation, and so that is the second document that is to be adopted tomorrow.

Similarly, as I have mentioned, while the Darfurians argue that democratization is an essential step towards the resolution of the conflict in Darfur, they also insist that elections cannot in themselves resolve this conflict. Therefore we have suggested that the Declaration of Commitment contains an undertaking to pursue the peaceful and inclusive resolution of the Darfur conflict.

One of the essential features of democracy is that it does not go away. These first democratic elections are historic, but they will surely not be the last. The Interim National Constitution in force today will be replaced by a new constitution for Sudan, or new constitutions for successor states in northern and southern Sudan, and without any doubt the Sudanese people, under any conditions, will demand their democratic rights. You have struggled for so long to achieve these rights that I am sure you will hold fast to them.

In conclusion, I would like to commend the Sudanese political parties, including both those in power and those currently in opposition, for their readiness to participate in this Summit Meeting. Taking the steps towards democracy, especially holding free and fair elections, are no easy task. They are not easy for either the party in power or for the opposition. Electoral competition introduces an element of uncertainty into the political order, and with it an element of fear. This is quite understandable.

Over recent years, many African countries have undergone transitions to democracy. Some have been outstandingly successful, while others have been troubled. We have learned many valuable lessons, often painfully. We come in that spirit of solidarity. And we come to offer our help.

We also come because Sudan is an indispensable part of Africa, and because the success of democratization in Sudan is essential to the health of Africa as a whole. We care for Sudan, not in an abstract or philanthropic way, but as one cares for a family member and neighbour. We are here today, and we will also be here tomorrow.

Across the continent, our experience is that if we are ready to trust our people and to work together, we can build trust and build a common future that is far better than our troubled past.

I have complete confidence that the people of southern Sudan, and their parties that are submitting themselves to the ultimate test of a free and fair election, can surmount their challenges and build a bright future.

I thank you.