



UN Press Release

22 November 2010

Encouraging signs ahead of Southern Sudan referendum

The voter registration process for the upcoming referendum on the status of Southern Sudan has been encouraging, but the problem of low turnout in the north remains. The United Nations Secretary-General's panel tasked with monitoring progress said today as it wrapped up its latest visit to the country.

During its 10-day trip, the three-member Panel visited voter registration centres in, for example, the disputed area of Abyei and held talks with senior Government officials, referendum authorities, religious leaders, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), political parties, the diplomatic community and citizens across the country.

The Panel's chair, Benjamin Mkapa, held a press conference in Khartoum that has been many promising signs during the visit, which coincided with the start of voter registration.

"We have seen lines of people standing patiently in the heat, waiting to register their votes on 9 January; we have spoken with observers, both Sudanese and international, as they have solemnly carried out their duties; and we have met countless people in the north and the south, who have told us that whatever the outcome of the vote, they are confident that everyone can live together peacefully," he said.

Mr. Mkapa commended the Southern Sudan Referendum Commission for its efforts to ensure that voter registration was able to begin on 15 November at almost all of the nearly 3,000 registration centres in Sudan, as well as at many of the centres in the countries outside Sudan where voting will take place. Registration is due to conclude on 1 December.

But he voiced concern about issues, including the low turnout at registration centres in the north, many Southern Sudanese apparently unwilling to register.

Mr. Mkapa called on the government in Khartoum and the media, civil society and referendum authorities to step up their efforts to promote and explain the referenda so that the public is better informed about their rights and options in the vote.

He also urged all sides to tone down rhetoric so that southerners living in the north and northerners living in the south feel assured their safety and their property will be protected.

"Only then will the public feel secure enough to turn out to register and to vote, without repercussions, wherever they live," Mr. Mkapa said.

The Panel is playing a good offices role on behalf of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to strengthen confidence in the Sudanese referendum process, and to encourage the parties and relevant authorities to resolve any significant problems or disputes as they arise. The first visit to Sudan took place last month.



Two referenda are slated for 9 January 2011: one in which the people of Southern Sudan will vote for either unity or secession, and another in which the people of the Abyei Area will vote to remain in the north or become part of the south.

Mr. Barrow formed the panel after a request from the parties to Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), who sought a UN monitoring body to help enhance the credibility of the referenda and therefore ensure the acceptance of their result by their constituents and the international community.

Aside from Mr. Mkapa, the Panel's members are António Monteiro, a former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Portugal, and Bhojraj Pokharel, a former Chairman of the Election Commission of Nepal.