



## **PRELIMINARY STATEMENT ON SUDAN'S VOTER REGISTRATION**

**Nov. 30, 2009**

This interim statement summarizes the observations of the Carter Center's election observation mission in Sudan during the first weeks of national voter registration, Nov. 1-26, 2009. While it is premature to make an overall assessment of many aspects of the voter registration process, the Center provides these preliminary observations now with the intent of supporting and improving the administration of Sudan's electoral process. A further, more in-depth statement will be published following the conclusion of voter registration.

National voter registration has largely been peaceful and the National Elections Commission (NEC) and state authorities are to be congratulated for this achievement. Overall, voter registration officials appear to be making dedicated and substantial efforts under often challenging conditions to implement registration activities.

The Center expresses concern, however, regarding the uneven rate of participation in certain regions of Sudan. Based on the NEC's figures so far, it appears that some areas of the country might register less than half of the estimated number of eligible voters, with the majority of states not reaching the NEC's registration target. Civic awareness of the process remains low and is contributing to the comparatively low rate of participation in registration in Eastern Sudan, North and South Kordofan, Darfur, and most states of Southern Sudan. While registration is a voluntary exercise, without civic education millions may effectively be disenfranchised by a combination of ignorance of the electoral process, mistrust of central authorities, and poor publicity of registration activities. Without specific attention to reaching those most distant from the process, the registration exercise will be undermined.

### **Extension and funding of registration**

The NEC's decision to extend registration is a welcome step, given the low rates of registration in some areas of the country and the delayed start of registration operations in some states. To make an extension of registration viable and meaningful, the NEC and the state elections committees must quickly devise and publicize the locations and schedules of voter registration centers that will operate during the extension. This is particularly important given the limited publicity voter registration schedules originally received.

In addition, on an urgent basis, the NEC should make available additional funds to the state elections committees so that they are able to take necessary steps to register voters in the extension period. The Center is aware that in some states, voter registration officers are yet to be paid any portion of their salaries. The NEC should direct state elections committees to ensure

that staff are paid on time and that any arrears are quickly cleared to avoid any operational interruptions in registration activity.

### **Provision of supplementary registration books and materials**

The Center has received and confirmed reports of shortages of voter registration books and some materials in Northern and Western Bahr el Ghazal, Warrap, Eastern Equatoria, Upper Nile and Unity States. Given that registration materials exist to register more than 100 percent of projected eligible voters nationally, it is imperative for NEC to replenish supplies to these states quickly so that registration activities are not obstructed.

### **Procedures of registration teams**

The extension of registration provides an opportunity to reinforce registration teams' compliance with standardized registration procedures. In particular, the Center's observers have reported that registration officials routinely do not inform registrants of the importance of safeguarding the registration receipt or of their right to view the preliminary voters' list to make corrections or present challenges, if necessary. Additionally, Center observers have noted many instances where registration officers are not informing registrants of the requirement for citizens to vote where they register. These messages are important aspects of voter education. Registration presents a critical opportunity of which electoral officials should take advantage to have direct contact with individual citizens.

### **Registration of military and police forces and prisoners**

The Center notes the NEC's Oct. 24 circular directing state elections committees to register military and police officials in registration centers closest to where they work and not where they reside. This regulation could potentially lead to military and police personnel being registered at both their places of residence and places of work. To ensure that multiple registration does not occur, the NEC should inform military and police leadership to provide appropriate instructions to their personnel.

With respect to incarcerated prisoners, the Center's observers have to date witnessed registration inside prisons in three states. Given the context of their participation, it is important to protect inmates from possible coercion, e.g., being forced to register or to vote. To that end, the Center urges the NEC to clarify how it intends to protect prisoners' civil rights in the electoral process.

### **Presence of security forces in Darfur**

In most locations, security forces have played a generally positive role in ensuring the security of registration centers. However, in Darfur, this has been achieved through the presence of agents of the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS). The presence of NISS agents at many registration centers in Darfur has been confirmed by the electoral authorities and reported by the Center's observers at voter registration sites visited. Given the continued tensions in Darfur, it is apparent that NISS is not an agency perceived neutrally by a substantial proportion of the population. Through their mere presence at centers, NISS agents may serve to intimidate some citizens from registering. The state elections committees in Darfur must ensure that the presence of security forces at centers is merely sufficient to ensure public order, and not be confused with any other operations of the state security apparatus.

### **Political party activity**

The presence of political party agents at registration centers is welcome. However, it is evident that at many centers political parties are engaging in a variety of party activities, including the collection of voter registration receipts, and the recording of registrant identity details and registration numbers. While not technically in violation of electoral regulations, it appears that citizens could easily become confused about these activities, especially if party representatives do not fully explain their activities. In particular, the collection of registration receipts by political parties could serve to disempower citizens from taking active responsibility for their own participation in civic affairs. The NEC should consider specifying a minimum distance from which political parties can operate from a registration center, and could instruct the parties not to engage in the practice of collecting registration receipts.

### **Data entry and procedures for challenges and exhibition**

Compiling an accurate electronic voter registry is an enormous challenge. While some state committees have made progress in establishing data entry centers, in Southern Sudan only one data entry center is currently fully operational. Some state committees continue to lack equipment and personnel necessary to input the registration data. The Center is concerned by state election committees' plans for the satisfactory verification and quality control of data inputted, and urges the NEC to consider implementing systematic procedures to ensure the highest level of accuracy is maintained.

In this sense, one of the instruments used to increase the credibility of the electoral register is to undertake an audit to assess its inclusiveness and accuracy. Considering the ongoing discussions about the accuracy of the census data, which are being used to establish the degree of inclusiveness of the electoral register, this would seem especially important in Sudan.

Very little is known by either registrants or registrars about procedures for the exhibition of the voters' lists. Given that this is the only registration exercise before the election, and that there is little remedy for inclusion later, it is important that citizens be aware of their right to view the voters' lists and make corrections, if necessary. Exhibition should not only be a technical exercise conducted by officials, but should genuinely allow for citizens to understand the results of the voter registration process. Widespread acceptance that the voters' list is comprehensive and accurate will help to build confidence in the electoral process.

Finally, the Center notes the importance of providing an adequate process for filing and resolving complaints on the voters' list. While the Elections Act states that complaint committees should be established in each geographical constituency, it seems that the NEC has decided to establish only one per state, which would not seem sufficient.

### **Electoral Process**

The Center notes that voter registration is a constituent part of the broader electoral process. As noted in previous Carter Center statements, very serious challenges remain in the electoral process, including critical steps to create a genuinely inclusive electoral environment, settle outstanding border demarcation issues, resolve the conflict in Darfur, and implement all aspects

of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. The Center reiterates again the importance of political actors taking all necessary steps to resolve these issues.

### **The Carter Center Observation Mission**

Following the commencement of long-term election observation activities in Sudan in February 2008 at the invitation of the Government of Sudan and the Government of Southern Sudan, The Carter Center has deployed 32 medium and long-term observers to assess voter registration and the broader political and electoral environment across Sudan. The observer delegation is drawn from 21 countries: Cameroon, Canada, DR Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Germany, India, Ireland, Italy, Kenya, Mozambique, the Netherlands, Norway, Palestine, Serbia, Spain, Uganda, the United Kingdom, the United States, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Center observers will remain in place for the duration of voter registration, now scheduled to end December 7, and will also observe the exhibition of and challenges to voters' lists in constituencies across the country. To date, The Carter Center mission has observed voter registration activities in more than 450 hundred registration fixed and mobile registration centers in 24 states across the country.

The objectives of the Carter Center's election observation mission in Sudan are to: a) provide an impartial assessment of the overall quality of the electoral process, b) promote an inclusive electoral process for all Sudanese, and c) demonstrate international interest in Sudan's electoral process. The mission is assessing the electoral process in Sudan based on the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, Interim National Constitution, National Elections Act, and obligations for democratic elections contained in regional and international agreements, including the African Charter on Human and People's Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.<sup>1</sup>

*The Carter Center conducts election observation missions in accordance with the Declaration of Principles of International Election Observation and Code of Conduct that was adopted at the United Nations in 2005 and has been endorsed by 33 election observation groups.*

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*The Carter Center was founded in 1982 by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and his wife, Rosalynn, in partnership with Emory University, to advance peace and health worldwide. A not-for-profit, nongovernmental organization, the Center has helped to improve life for people in more than 70 countries by resolving conflicts; advancing democracy, human rights, and economic opportunity; preventing diseases; improving mental health care; and teaching farmers to increase crop production. The Carter Center began working in Sudan in 1986 on the Sasakawa-Global 2000 agricultural project and for more than 20 years its health and peace programs have focused on improving health and preventing and resolving conflicts in Sudan. Please visit [www.cartercenter.org](http://www.cartercenter.org) to learn more about The Carter Center.*

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<sup>1</sup> Sudan ratified the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) on Feb. 18, 1986. The ACHPR came into force on Oct. 21, 1986 after its adoption in Nairobi (Kenya) in 1981 by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). In addition, Sudan ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights on March 18, 1986, which entered into force on March 23, 1976.