



*For Immediate Release*

17<sup>th</sup> Dec 2010

## **SuDEMOP STATEMENT ON THE FINDINGS OF OBSERVATION DURING VOTER REGISTRATION FOR SOUTHERN SUDAN REFERENDUM**

Sudan Domestic Election Monitoring and Observation Programme (SuDEMOP) observed the entire Voter Registration exercise from 15<sup>th</sup> November to 8<sup>th</sup> December. During this period, SuDEMOP trained and deployed 148 Long Term Observers (LTOs) and 364 Short Term Observers to observe different aspects of the Voter Registration process. SuDEMOP LTOs serve as specialized observers to conduct Conflict Tracking and Mapping.

SuDEMOP LTOs were also trained to carry out a Voter Register Audit (VRA) in 73 out of 79 counties of Southern Sudan, where they were deployed. The VRA is designed as a survey to confirm if the names of people who have registered appear on the final register posted at Referendum Centers (RCs) during the exhibition period. SuDEMOP took the initiative to conduct a Voter Register Audit, so as to safe guard the process and ensure that the people of Southern Sudan can freely exercise their right to self determination through the referendum.

SuDEMOP observation during the voter registration process noted a peaceful and calm process apart from some isolated security incidences. These incidences include the aerial bombing in Aweil North on 13<sup>th</sup> November, where seven civilians were reported to have been killed; the aerial bombing in the village of Akiir Dem on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2010; and inter-clan clashes in Akobo County in Jonglei State.

SuDEMOP observed no major challenges to the process and noted procedural errors in less than 2% of RCs observed. Generally the referendum officials were observed to be better trained and more knowledgeable than the voter registration officials for April 2010 Sudan General Elections. Turnout for registration in Southern Sudan was high, especially in the first week. The population in urban area is more informed about the process as opposed to those in the rural areas. This can be attributed to the extensive civic and voter information which has been conducted in urban areas. However, this was less true in more rural areas where civic and voter information was not often extended, due to the high degree of difficulty involved in reaching these areas.

### **SuDEMOP Methodology**

SuDEMOP deployed static teams of two Short Term Observers per Referendum Center. After a period of two days, observer teams were rotated to different Referendum Centers. Observer teams completed a checklist on their findings each day and these were sent to a central data center via the network of SuDEMOP LTOs, state coordinators and regional coordinators. The data center began operations on November 20 when the first batch of checklists arrived, and has so far received and

entered checklists from 8 States. Almost all checklists have now been received and we anticipate that we will have all checklists entered by December 20<sup>th</sup>.

We are also proud to mention that, with the committed team of SuDEMOP Observers, we are observing the data entry process which is currently being conducted at the Southern Sudan Referendum Bureau (SSRB). We have endeavored to carry out interconnected activities in order to ensure that we follow all the aspects of the process and serve as a true witness to the referendum process.

### **Findings of SuDEMOP Observers**

The following findings are based on observation checklists received from our observers during the registration period.

Procedures were very well handled. Generally, less than 1% of observers noted problems with any of the steps. In particular the details on the registration cards were filed in correctly, thumb prints were taken and fingers were marked with ink correctly. The only problematic area procedurally was examination of applicants for evidence of ink when entering the RC which was not preformed regularly in 4.8% of the centers observed. This needs to be addressed in training prior to polling.

We are pleased to note that Referendum Center staff were considerably better trained than their counterparts during the 2010 elections. Observers rated the staff as well trained in almost 98% of cases. All procedures such as filling out registration cards, instructions to applicants, dipping the registrants' finger in ink etc were well conducted with only a few isolated problems – less than two per cent for each procedure.

Registration materials were present in 95% of centers. Observers noted that although materials sometimes ran out they were generally resupplied very quickly, mostly within two hours. However, in some instances, such as in Wulu, Lakes State, the centers went more than two days without receiving more materials. According to our observers, the referendum officials had a difficult task re-informing people to come back and register. In Morobo town, the registration officials addressed the shortage by borrowing registration materials from a nearby registration center. The applicants were then informed to go to vote in the registration center where the registers originate from. However, we strongly recommend that this group of people be informed again of their correct polling center so as to avoid confusion during polling.

Identifiers were present in 95% of Referendum Center's observed, and could be called when needed. Identifiers were mostly village chiefs or elders. However, in 5.9% of cases observers noted that the identifier did not act in an impartial manner. There were a high number of cases where observers felt that eligible applicants were not allowed to register (over 15%) and where ineligible applicants were allowed to register (6.7%). However, these figures were not linked to the presence or absence of an identifier.

Observers also noted that many applicants had long distances to travel in some areas. The greatest distance recorded by SuDEMOP observers was in Twic East, Jonglei State, where villagers have to travel 65 miles from Dhaim Dhaim to the nearest RC. Observers in Unity and Upper Nile States noted that the long distances between Referendum Centers affected the number of applicants coming to register. Many people complained to observers that the number of RCs is far less than during the election.

There was adequate security at the Referendum Centers. Security personnel were present outside over 88% of RCs observed, most of whom were police. In most Referendum Centers, registration was conducted in a peaceful environment with the notable exceptions of security incidents in Akobo and Kiir Adem. SuDEMOP observers as far away as Yei reported that the bombings had an impact on the population, creating fears of what would happen if the secession vote wins. There were also reports of child abduction in Twic East County in Jonglei State from outside an RC.

In 8.5% of centers observed, there was interference from unauthorized persons in the registration centers. SuDEMOP encourages all people to respect the role of referendum officials in this process and the role of security personnel.

SuDEMOP observers noted with concern that most civil society organizations concentrated their voter information activities in town centers, leaving rural areas without adequate information. Observers attributed the high turn out to the political campaign; however this has less information about the legal framework and the referendum procedures. For example, in one village in Lake State people refused to register for the first two days claiming that they had already registered during the general election and didn't need to do so again. Others in the village chose not to register in protest to the forceful disarmament exercise which was conducted in February this year. Ultimately elders were persuaded to explain the importance of the referendum exercise to the population. In Jonglei, Warrap, and Lake State some pastoralist communities chose to herd their cattle rather than registering for the referendum.

20.5% of the centers observed, the notice of exhibition was missing. Generally, observers feel that people didn't understand what the exhibition period was about. A number of observers noted problems with successful registrants losing their cards. Since there is no possibility of issuing replacements cards, voters are meant to inform the sub-committee that they have lost their card in order for them to be de-registered. There is no voter information on this and many people do not realize that they will not be able to vote. In addition, it could have an impact on the turnout threshold.

Observers reported high turn out in the first week of registration with long queues at closing time. On average 250 to 300 people registered on the first day at each RC in Southern Sudan. The Dr John Garang Mausoleum Registration Center had 999 applicants register on 15 November including the President of the Government of Southern Sudan, Salva Kiir Mayerdit.

SuDEMOP wish to commend SSRC/SSRB for the ongoing data entry and aggregation of registration figures. We would like to mention that this is done in presence of both domestic and international observer groups which is a prerequisite for the transparency and legitimacy of the referendum process. However SuDEMOP recommends that the storage of the registration materials should be indexed by state and referendum Centers numbers/names to avoid confusion.

SuDEMOP appreciates the good work done by SSRC/SSRB, during the voter registration exercise. We urge SSRC/SSRB to continue ensuring that the referendum is held as scheduled. Finally, SuDEMOP asks the two parties to be committed in this last phase of CPA implementation and stand ready to accept the outcome of the referendum no matter the result.

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