



## THE SUDANESE NETWORK FOR DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS STATEMENT ON THE EVE OF VOTER REGISTRATION PROCESS

November 13, 2010

The Sudanese Network for Democratic Elections (SuNDE), a coalition of over 75 non-partisan civil society organizations located in all ten states of Southern Sudan, developed and released a set of recommendations on September 8, 2010 to ensure a timely, transparent, peaceful, and fair referendum process. This statement on the Southern Sudan Referendum process is based on comparing those recommendations with the rules, regulations, and guidelines released so far by the Southern Sudan Referendum Commission (SSRC) as well as information gathered from Referendum officials and other stakeholders.

### Executive Summary

SuNDE is encouraged that the SSRC included some of SuNDE's recommendations in the framework for the Referendum. This includes confirming that Referendum Centers will be the place where voters will both register to vote and cast their ballot during the polling days. This will reduce confusion for voters on the polling days.

SuNDE notes that voter registration will last for only 17 days and encourages Referendum officials to finish the final preparations for the voter registration process swiftly. It is important that registration start on time in both Southern and Northern Sudan and in the eight out-of-country voting locations so that all eligible voters have a fair and equal chance to register. SuNDE is pleased that its observers have reported that registration materials have been sent to the states and that training for Referendum Center staff has begun in many areas.

However, the inability of the SSRC to issue relevant and necessary rules and regulations or release Referendum Center lists in a timely manner delayed the start of voter education activities and compromised the ability of domestic observation groups, like SuNDE, to receive accreditation cards in time to observe the beginning of the voter registration process. The SSRC, South Sudan Referendum Bureau (SSRB), and civil society organizations should intensify voter education efforts so citizens have the information they need to participate in the registration process.

In addition to releasing accreditation procedures late, the SSRC issued confusing and contradictory sets of accreditation procedures. The November 1, 2010 issued and stamped regulations and the regulations on the SSRC website differ, and this has caused confusion among Referendum officials charged with accrediting observers and has further delayed the process of accreditation.

SuNDE looks forward to observing the Referendum process and to continued cooperation with all Referendum authorities during the registration period.

#### Delay in the Release of Rules and Regulations

In the recommendations SuNDE released on September 8, SuNDE urged the SSRC to develop rules and procedures for the registration process in a timely manner. The SSRC failed to do so. As of the writing of this statement, the SSRC has not yet published official rules and regulations for the voter registration process. There is a published manual which describes the voter registration procedures, but the late release of the procedures caused a delay in the start of voter education activities. SuNDE is concerned that citizens will not have the information they need to participate confidently in the registration process.

A complete Referendum Center list has also not yet been released by the SSRC. Without a comprehensive list of Referendum Centers and their locations, citizens will not know where to go to register. The absence of complete and accurate lists of Referendum Centers also makes it very challenging for organizations to organize and execute observation activities. The recruitment of observers and the development of observer deployment plans are significantly hindered without a complete list of Referendum Center locations.

SuNDE encourages the SSRC to release Center lists immediately and publicize them widely and urges civil society organizations to expand voter education activities and to continue with voter education activities throughout the registration process.

#### Observer Accreditation

Accreditation rules were issued on November 1 giving organizations little time to accredit their observers. Further, the SSRC issued a contradictory set of accreditation procedures after November 1, further confusing and delaying the process. The SSRC originally approved accreditation procedures on November 1 did not require domestic observers to submit photographs to be accredited. However, the accreditation forms posted on the SSRC website on November 7 indicates that domestic observers should submit two color passport photos with the accreditation applications.

Requiring domestic observers to submit photos limits the ability of citizens to observe and assess the process since many citizens in the South do not have easy access to photography studios. SuNDE recommends that the SSRC remove this requirement from the accreditation forms posted online.

The accreditation process also remains highly centralized with only the SSRC and the SSRB able to approve accreditation and issue accreditation badges. Given the short timeframe, this poses a huge logistical burden on domestic organizations to receive accreditation badges and then transport them to observers in the states in time to observe the start of the voter registration process.

Clear, consistent, and timely accreditation procedures are critical to ensure observers can be deployed at the beginning and throughout all Referendum processes so that organizations can provide the public with an assessment of the entire process. This is important to building public confidence in the Referendum.

Referendum officials should acknowledge the delays in the release of the accreditation procedures and commit themselves to facilitating and expediting the accreditation process for organizations who wish to observe. This will be important to guaranteeing that the voter registration process is fully transparent.

Further, SuNDE recommends the SSRB delegate the authority to approve accreditation for observers and issue accreditation cards to State High Committees. This will streamline the accreditation process and make it easier for organizations who want to observe the Referendum.

The accreditation rules also fail to distinguish between non-partisan domestic observers and party agents/advocates as SuNDE recommended. Not distinguishing between these two groups poses a potential challenge for domestic observers who might be confused with partisan observers during the process. SuNDE strongly recommends that the SSRC to develop separate accreditation rules for party agents/advocates and issue different badges to party agents/advocates prior to the polling period.

SUNDE appreciates that International Observers have been invited to observe the process. This will enhance the transparency and credibility of the Referendum.

## Voter Registration Process

### Eligibility Requirements

SuNDE recommended that the SSRC clarify the eligibility requirements for voters, specifically how Referendum Officials will determine whether an applicant meets the three definitions of a Southern Sudanese outlined in the Southern Sudan Referendum Act. Unfortunately, the SSRC has provided little guidance on how to determine eligibility, such as providing officials with a list of the ethnic and indigenous communities of Southern Sudan. It is unclear how Referendum Officials will make decisions regarding the eligibility of applicants particularly in the North and in border areas where the physical appearance of an applicant may not be sufficient to determine whether the applicant is Southern Sudanese.

The lack of clarification on eligibility requirements could cause eligible voters to be denied registration and ineligible voters to be registered and leaves the voter registration process vulnerable to manipulation.

### Referendum Centers as Voting Centers

SUNDE commends the SSRC for confirming that Referendum Centers will be both the place where citizens register and the place where they will vote. During SuNDE's observation of the 2010 General Elections, there was significant frustration among voters who could not find their polling station. Making Referendum Centers the place where citizens both register and vote will reduce confusion for voters during the Referendum polling days.

## Security

SuNDE urges the SSRC and SSRB to ensure uniformed police are trained on their roles and responsibilities and deployed at Referendum Centers during the registration days to maintain security.

SuNDE observers reported a troubling number of incidents of intimidation and harassment during the 2010 General Elections. SuNDE observers reported that many of these incidents were caused by unknown or unauthorized security personnel. SuNDE calls on the Government of Sudan and the Government of Southern Sudan to prohibit unauthorized security personnel and agencies from interfering in the referendum process through public announcement and all other available means.

SuNDE also commends political parties for developing and committing to a Code of Conduct throughout the Referendum process. The Code of Conduct can help prevent violence and ensure that all viewpoints on the Referendum can be expressed freely.

SuNDE recognizes that there is about two months left until polling is scheduled to start and that Referendum Officials have many important preparatory activities to accomplish before polling can commence. SuNDE urges all officials and stakeholders to work diligently to ensure the Referendum timeline is met.

Lastly, SuNDE strongly urges all citizens and political parties to remain peaceful and patient during the voter registration process.

## About SuNDE

The Sudanese Network for Democratic Elections (SuNDE) is a non-partisan coalition of over 75 civil society organizations committed to promoting the ability of the public to participate freely, equitably, and effectively in transparent and accountable democratic processes.

SuNDE has members and trained volunteers in all ten Southern States and in 60 out of 78 counties. SuNDE is the largest domestic observation group in Southern Sudan.

SuNDE will deploy 500 observers in Southern Sudan to observe the voter registration process and 200 observers in the North with the assistance of SuNDE's partner the Sudanese Group for Democracy and Elections (SuGDE).