



UN Press Release

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Statement by Secretary-General's Panel after conclusion of voting in Southern Sudan referendum

The United Nations Secretary-General's Panel on the Referenda in the Sudan welcomes the conclusion of polling in the Southern Sudan referendum yesterday. The Panel congratulates the people of Sudan who made this vote possible, on schedule and peaceful. Much credit goes to the Southern Sudan Referendum Commission (SSRC) and the Southern Sudan Referendum Bureau (SSRB), which overcame serious time and resource constraints.

Moreover, the parties to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement summoned the courage and political commitment required to ensure that the peace process they embarked upon would be fulfilled by having this referendum take place as stipulated in the Agreement. They are to be commended for this achievement.

During the week of polling, the Panel's three members visited referendum centres in eight states, and the Panel's staff monitored the process in all Southern states and across the North. The presence of over 22,000 Sudanese and international observers has helped make the process transparent. Staff at referendum centres coped admirably with the very high turnout.

Based on its observations, and those of its staff in the field, as well as from accounts conveyed by various interlocutors in Sudan, the Panel is satisfied that the process allowed the people of Southern Sudan to express their will freely.

The process of transmitting the results from nearly 3,000 referendum centres to county and state levels, and then to Juba and/or Khartoum, has started. It will be some weeks before the final, official results are known. While the Sudanese would want to know the outcome of the referendum quickly, we urge the people of Sudan to be patient and be aware that only the results announced by the referendum authorities are official.

The Panel urges Government authorities and the SSRC to make every effort to ensure that all citizens are kept well-informed of the progress towards the final results. It calls on the media and political forces to report on this progress in a responsible manner.

The Panel also stresses the importance of the protection of civilians in the weeks ahead. Southerners living in the North and Northerners living in the South must be able to go about their daily lives in safety and dignity, and the Panel calls on all sides to play their part to ensure the security of the population.

The Panel has the task of monitoring the processes for two referenda: one on the status of Southern Sudan, and one on the status of the Abyei Area. It is not in place to run the referenda, serve as an observer mission or certify the results.

The Panel is playing a good offices role on behalf of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to strengthen confidence in the Sudanese-led referenda process, and to encourage the parties and relevant authorities to resolve any significant problems or disputes as they emerge.

Mr. Ban formed the Panel after the parties to Sudan's CPA requested a UN monitoring body to help enhance the credibility of the referenda and therefore ensure the acceptance of their result by the people of Sudan and the international community.

The Panel is comprised of Benjamin Mkapa, a former President of Tanzania; António Monteiro, a former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Portugal; and Bhojraj Pokharel, a former Chairman of the Election Commission of Nepal.