



News Feature: Independent Southern Sudan and How the two Sudans Become Stable Nations

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On January 3rd 2011, at an event to mark the success of the preparations for Southern Sudan's long-awaited referendum, the Chairman of the Southern Sudan Referendum Bureau, Justice Chan Reec Madut, declared that the South is at the brink of making a momentous decision. He said that the hard work of the bureau, the financial, logistical and personnel support by the United States, the European Union, Norway and the United Nations, have all brought the process to remarkable success. The registration was conducted peacefully, 21,000 polling staff have been trained and deployed, ballot papers have been distributed to all the centers, the independent observer missions have identified and trained their staff, and vehicles have been purchased or hired. He thanked the United States for its commitment to ensuring that the people of Southern Sudan get their long awaited wish to make the decision to stay in unity or separate from the North.

Even more remarkable is the short time in which this gigantic endeavor was accomplished, and the meager funds available for it. Initially it was estimated that it would cost \$378 million, and commitments were made by the government of National Unity in Khartoum to come up with this sum, but so far "not a piaster has come from Khartoum," remarked the Chairman. However, the government of Southern Sudan has put up 51 million Sudanese Pounds (approximately \$20 million) and the Bureau has used it very effectively, managing to bring the process to where it is now, just moments away from the referendum. At this same event, the representative of the Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS), Minister of Cabinet Affairs Kosti Manibe, announced that money will not be an obstacle to the process and assured the Bureau that "if we have to suspend everything else in order to pay for the referendum, we will do so." The Minister also joked that "nothing short of the end of the world will prevent the referendum from being conducted on January 9th... I don't think that the end of the world will come in the next few days...Why would it wait for thousands of years since the beginning of time only for it to happen now, just as we are near our destination?"

Throughout Southern Sudan, churches are holding prayers for a peaceful referendum, youth groups are celebrating, women's groups are expressing their



commitment to a vote for independence, and trade unions are talking openly about the justification for separation. Even the GoSS has officially joined the call for independence, arguing that the government in Khartoum had failed to uphold its commitment to making “unity attractive,” as the Comprehensive Peace Agreement calls for. The euphoria of this moment is unmistakable. But so is the mix of uncertainties that await the South, should it become independent, with the joy of possibly parting ways with the old oppressive Sudan.

In conversations with people across Southern Sudan, from cattle herders to rural peasants, from small traders to big business people, from soldiers to civil servants, from urban poor to members of parliament, and with top political and ruling class officials, these mixed feelings are omnipresent. At the moment, the image of a new nation in the South, free of war and destruction and led by a government that is closer to the people and accountable to them, is extremely seductive. But that image does not blind the people to the reality of an uncertain future. On the basis of pure nationalist sentiment, the vote and possible independence cannot come soon enough. But on the basis of individual everyday experiences, there is no hiding the uncertainty of what will become of the lives of ordinary people who rely on trade links with the North to access basic goods everyday, what will happen during the interim period following the vote and before the actual declaration of a successor state, and what the would-be landlocked state will do to generate income. People are aware of the challenges that an independent South will face, but “no amount of suffering in an independent and free state will outweigh the tragic history of being part of a united Sudan,” remarked one member of My Referendum My Freedom, a youth civil society group.

Southern Sudan is now widely expected to become Africa’s newest nation, as there are no signs of real trouble surrounding the referendum. A peaceful process appears possible. But there will be a plethora of complicated issues that will take years to work out between North and South and within the two states. The most complex questions include nationality and citizenship, division of assets and international debts, border issues and managing cross-border movement and trade, and sharing the wealth from the southern oil in exchange for the use of the oil facilities in the north, including the pipeline to Port Sudan on the Red Sea. Both the North and the South are bound by mutual dependence, at least in the short-to-medium term. About 80% of Sudan's oil reserves and production are in Southern Sudan, while the infrastructure for exploiting the oil runs through the North. Both sides are highly dependent on the oil industry. Many in Sudan and abroad are focused on ensuring the referendum exercise takes place on 9 January as planned. But simultaneously pursuing agreement on the broader post-referendum agenda is not only critical to a peaceful transition and long-term regional stability, but may also serve the more immediate objective of clearing the path for a mutually accepted referendum. If these issues are not successfully negotiated before the end of the CPA while there is still one Sudan, they will become even more difficult to settle between two sovereign countries. So far negotiating these issues has seen much shuttle diplomacy on both sides and by the African Union High-level Implementation Panel,



IGAD, European Union, UN Security Council, the Arab League and individual countries in the region, but they have yet to show signs of an agreement being reached.

Political leaders in North and South are aware that a vote for Southern independence will confront the nation with challenges that must be addressed constructively by both sides. This means making the process of partition as harmonious as possible and laying the foundation for a peaceful and cooperative coexistence and continued interaction. But such awareness of what will face Sudan has not been the guiding light in these negotiations. The Sudanese people expect and deserve practical measures to be taken to ensure continued sharing of such vital resources as oil and water, encourage cross-border trade, protect freedom of movement, residence and employment across the borders, and leave the door open for periodically revisiting the prospects of unification. For example, if the SPLM negotiating teams insists on total control of oil revenues, to the extent of risking a return to war, they might be well advised to weight the cost of war against a certain percentage of revenues they might concede to the North in order to buy peace. By the same token, the NCP would be remiss to think of its access to oil and other Southern sources of revenue as a matter of natural entitlement without regard to the history of exploitation the South has been subjected to.

However, in addition to the bilateral issues, the most unpredictable issues, perhaps most dangerous to the stability of each of the two states, involve the internal dynamics within the borders of each one. The National Congress Party, the ruling party in the North, will face a serious internal challenge due to what will be seen as a legacy of failure for letting the South go, and for not settling the wars in Darfur, Kordofan and Red Sea Hills, not to speak of significantly reduced income from oil. President Bashir has already been caught in many contradictory remarks regarding the future political climate in the North. For instance, when the main opposition parties recently held joint meetings, suggesting that they might work to overthrow his government, he told them to go and "lick your elbow." But a few days later, he called for a "broad-based government to unite the internal front." This is suggestive of a difficult climate that the ruling party will have to sort through. To be accommodating and widening the powerbase might give it breathing space, but to respond with an iron fist, as some of the NCP's core strongmen suggest, could mean a plunge into chaos. This could occur due to a combination of the outstanding conflicts in Darfur, the possible confrontation with the South on the issue of Abyei and other border areas, and international pressures on the government to relax its Islamic policies.

In the case of an independent South, the euphoria of independence will be accompanied by challenges of building a new nation, a project that will have to go beyond the usual temptation in new states to focus on infrastructural development and delivery of basic social services. As a new state, Southern Sudan also needs to become a nation. To be a nation means having a citizenry that takes pride in citizenship in "Southern Sudan" first and in tribal citizenship second. Such a nation can no longer assume that shared interests alone will continue to unite it. So far, the



South's struggle to wrestle freedom from the grips of successive Khartoum-based governments has been the most unifying force for Southern Sudan. Now that there will be no more "North" to collectively oppose, what should unite the South is the desire to build a strong nation together, a nation based on a shared identity. Such a shared identity will need to be harnessed and politically constructed.

The most significant impediment to Southern Sudan's cohesion and citizens' loyalty and pride in their nation will be a growing sense of exclusion from the national platform, media, government programs and access to services. If exclusionary practices that are based on ethnic differences continue in a new South, they will have a detrimental effect on its viability as a nation. Any citizen who will feel excluded will never develop that important sense of pride in his/her nation. Southern Sudan will need to demonstrate that it belongs to all Southern Sudanese; that it does not belong to any ethnic, religious or political group. This means that the government, civil society, business community and ordinary citizens must commit themselves to preserving, displaying and celebrating the cultural practices that are common to all Southerners. To join a community of independent nations, the country will also need to identify its own homegrown philosophy of development, democracy, and open, participatory system of governance. To be strong and respected, it must build itself on pillars of internal peace promotion, political unity, a disciplined military, and equitable distribution of services, and build symbols of nationhood around which to rally the public.