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Media Monitoring Report

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Highlights

Juba Alliance to meet today to decide on elections

Leaders of the National Consensus Forces (Juba Alliance) will hold a meeting today in Omdurman to coordinate their positions on the upcoming elections, *local dailies* report. According to *Al-Sahafa*, the SPLM announced that it would abide by whatever decision the alliance takes. "If the Alliance decides to boycott elections we will also do so but in the North only. We will contest in the South including the Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan states," SPLM Secretary General Pagan Amum said. On threats by Al-Bashir on referendum, Amum said, "we advice Al-Bashir not to threaten the people of the South especially that the right to self-determination is not a donation from anybody. It is the result of the struggle of the people of the South who are also capable of defending their right". He said Al-Bashir knows very well that there is no link between elections and referendum. "It seems Al-Bashir is not stable these days that is why he is threatening to expel international observers and to obstruct referendum," Amum said.

Al-Bashir to launch election campaign in Kurmuk today

NCP presidential candidate Omer Al-Bashir will launch his elections campaign in Kurmuk (Blue Nile State) today, *Al-Rai Al-Aam* reports. NCP candidate for governor of the state Farah Mohamed said all preparations have been finalized for Al-Bashir to address a mass rally in Damazin today.

Elections postponement depends on referendum delay - NCP

The NCP announced the possibility of postponement of elections if the SPLM agrees to delay the referendum, *Akhir Lahza* reports. Presidential Adviser Mustafa Osman considered the opposition's petition to the Presidency as "face-saving" after the parties realized that they will not win. "If the political parties want elections to be postponed they should convince the SPLM to agree to delay the referendum," he said.

Ballot cards printed in Arabic only – says Printing Press

Sudanese Currency Printing Press announced that ballot cards for presidential elections were printed in Arabic only, *Al-Ahdath* reports. Printing Press official Mahmoud Osman Al-Tayeb pointed out that the ballots are in Arabic because the Press received designs in Arabic only. An NEC official said the error occurred as things were rushed but the SPLM insisted that it was intentional.

SPLM reacts to Al-Bashir's statement on referendum

GoSS has rejected President Al-Bashir's statement that referendum would not take place if the SPLM refuses to participate in elections, saying the timing of the statement is unfortunate, *Al-Sudani* reports. GoSS Presidential Affairs Minister Luka Biong said no party has the right to interfere with the CPA especially the conduct of referendum. He wondered whether Al-Bashir made the statements as NCP Chairman or as head of state. "There is no link between the elections and the referendum," he said. Biong revealed that the SPLM Political Bureau will meet today to decide whether to run for elections all over the country or confine its participation to the South including Abyei and the Blue Nile areas.

US Gration to mediate between NCP and SPLM on elections

Ajras Al-Hurriya reports that US envoy Scott Gration is determined to mediate between the NCP and the National Consensus Forces on elections. A statement issued by the office of the National Umma Party said Gration is due in Khartoum in two days for the purpose.

URRP threatens elections boycott if NCP fails to respond

Umma Reform and Renewal Party (URRP) presidential candidate Mubarak Al-Fadil Al-Mahdi said his party would boycott the entire election process should the Government fails to consider their demands, **Ajras Al-Hurriah** reports. He said the NCP made plans to rig elections, citing irregularities in the voter register, printing of ballot cards inside Sudan and the NEC's violation of the elections law. Al-Mahdi added that upcoming elections would not secure Al-Bashir the constitutional and international recognition he needs and will not extricate the regime out of Darfur crisis or ward off possible separation of the South. He said if the minimum requirements for fair and impartial elections are not met the process would not be successful.

NCP fires five leading figures for contesting as independents

The NCP has fired five of its leading figures who decided to contest elections as independent candidates and threatened to dismiss whoever violates the party rules, **Al-Sahafa** reports. Presidential Aide Nafie Ali Nafie has described the upcoming elections as "decisive" and the "mother of all battles". Nafie, who was addressing an election rally in Sinnar yesterday, reiterated his party's position that elections would not be postponed.

Sudanese right activists condemn pre-election arrests, killings in Darfur

Sudan Tribune website 30/3/10 — Sudan Human Rights Organization (SHRO), a Cairo-based rights body has widely condemned the ongoing series of pre-election arrests, harassments and killings in Sudan's western region of Darfur describing it as "violating the fundamental right to life".

In a statement sent to Sudan Tribune, the rights body, which strives to enforce constitutional guarantees for the right to life, said Khartoum government-backed militias attacked a camp of displaced citizens at Kass, killing civilians and pillaging and harassing victimized families.

"The Sudan Human Rights Organization - Cairo condemns in the strongest terms possible the shameless aggressiveness by ruling elements against the Darfuri citizens and students," the statement partly reads.

Reacting to the recently declared presidential amnesty by Sudan government to Darfuris accused of attacking government forces in Omdurman over a year ago, SHRO described the development as "late-coming promises" that do not benefit citizens.

According to the Cairo-based organization, the commitment of the government of Sudan to the humanitarian needs of the country to prohibit death sentences has been lingering behind at the expense of the due process of justice and the rule of law, while state violence, it added, continues in Darfur and against Darfuris in Khartoum.

"The organization [SHRO] requires the competent authorities to conduct urgent judicial fact-finding investigations on the attacks and the murders of Darfuri citizens in Darfur and the National Capital," the statement advocated, while appealing to the United Nations, the US Government, and the African Union to convene promptly an All-Sudanese national conference on Darfur.

The proposed conference, further agitated SHRO, should provide full participation for all of the Darfuris' civil society associations, political parties, and armed groups besides representatives of the existing Khartoum and Juba pre-elections' governments, and the members of the Juba (September 2009) and the Tayba Azraq (October 2009) democratic conferences.

The conference will reportedly prepare an urgent action plan to enforce the constitutional rights guaranteed by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and the Interim Constitution for the tranquility, national participation, and well-being of the citizens of Darfur.

SPLM, opposition worried over Bashir's campaigns in the South

Local dailies report former NISS DG Gen. Salah Gosh as saying that the SPLM and the political parties' candidates are worried by popular support NCP candidate Al-Bashir is generating during his campaign tours in southern Sudan. He said civilians in the South are being intimidated and terrorized so that they do not vote for Al-Bashir, adding campaigns of intimidation and harassment might continue during the coming days.

France supports Juba Alliance to overthrow NCP– Nafie

Presidential Assistant Nafie Ali Nafie revealed that France is involved in the formation and sustaining of the Juba Alliance to overthrow the NCP Government, **Al-Intibaha** reports. Nafie, who made the statement yesterday while addressing an elections rally in Sinnar, said France, resorted to this design after it has failed on the ICC option.

SPLM "unlikely" to boycott the elections – Machar

Sudan Tribune website 31/3/10 – GoSS VP Riek Machar Teny today said it is "unlikely" that the SPLM will boycott the April elections in Sudan. Machar who led a high level party team for the last four days in Khartoum, on his return from the Khartoum today said he discussed with the parties concerned issues that were raised by the opposition parties that requested for the postponement of the elections. He said the request to postpone the elections came from opposition parties but the SPLM had to listen to any issues that would make the conduct of elections free and fair, saying his team got answers based on their consultative meetings with various parties including the National Elections Commission (NEC).

He said he had come back to Juba to brief the chairman, Salva Kiir Mayardit, and for the SPLM Political Bureau to discuss the outcome of the Khartoum consultations. Machar who was also accompanied by Yasir Arman, presidential candidate, Deng Alor Kuol, Foreign Minister and Dr. Luka Biong Deng, minister of GoSS Presidential Affairs, said the elections are assumed to be ongoing until the Presidency says otherwise.

"The elections are on. Since the Presidency has not met to say otherwise, the elections are on. No body has said the elections are off," he told a group of journalists at Juba Airport. He said his party was intervening to dialogue with both the NCP and the opposition forces to find a solution that would address the concerns raised to the Presidency by the opposition parties.

Dr. Machar added the party is going to hold an extraordinary meeting today to come out with a decision on the fate of the elections. Machar is expected to travel back to Khartoum this evening after the meeting of the Political Bureau.

Sudan SPLM will boycott elections if opposition do

Reuters 30/3/10 - The junior partner in Sudan's coalition government may unite with opposition parties to boycott April elections in the north to defend free and fair voting, a senior party official said on Tuesday.

President Omar Hassan al-Bashir on Monday warned former rebel group Sudan People's Liberation Movement if it boycotted the election there would be no southern referendum on secession in 2011, heightening tensions in Africa's largest country.

But SPLM Secretary General Pagan Amum dismissed Bashir's warning, "In the case of northern Sudan, if the political parties boycott the elections in defence of free and fair elections in the north, the SPLM will join them."

"He is threatening the people of southern Sudan to obstruct the right of referendum -- this is a very dangerous position."

A Tuesday meeting between Bashir and his deputy, SPLM chief Salva Kiir, was cancelled abruptly because Bashir's National Congress Party refused to add opposition concerns to the agenda.

Bashir's NCP and the SPLM signed a 2005 peace deal ending more than 20 years of civil war. The accord gave the south its own semi-autonomous government and formed a coalition government in Khartoum.

But SPLM officials have said the NCP remained in full control of authority and their own ministers were "rubber stamps". Relations are at an all-time low and Monday's comment was the first time Bashir had threatened the secession vote.

The first multi-party presidential and legislative polls in 24 years are to begin on April 11, but opposition parties accuse the National Elections Commission of bias towards the NCP, which the commission denies.

On Tuesday, the latest in a string of errors emerged as the government agency charged with printing presidential and governors' voting papers, said it had only printed presidential ballots in Arabic. South Sudan is mostly English-speaking.

The NEC error adds to a string of problems with the polls, already some of the most complex in the world with 1,000 different ballots and with voters making at least eight different votes.

International observers said hundreds of thousands of names were missing from the electoral register and opposition parties are outraged by a NEC decision to allow a state-owned printing press to print ballots and the voter registration books.

"We were given designs for the ballots in Arabic only," Mahmoud Osman al-Tayyib, production manager at the governmental Sudanese Currency Printing Press told Reuters.

One official from the National Elections Commission said the error was due to haste and that lists of candidates in English were being sent to southern voting centres as a reference for those who could not understand Arabic.

Another NEC member Mokhtar al-Asam told Reuters, "As long as the party symbols and pictures are there it should be fine."

But the SPLM said the error was deliberate and aimed at excluding southern voters. With 25 percent of the electorate in the south, the SPLM's presidential candidate Yasir Arman is widely seen as Bashir's biggest competitor.

"I don't think it's an error, it's a calculated thing," said senior SPLM official Waleed Hamid. "They are taking Sudan into chaos."

Two key Darfur rebel groups warn against holding April vote

Sudan Tribune website 30/3/10 — The two major rebel groups fighting in Sudan's Western region of Darfur have warned against holding the general elections set to start in less than two weeks saying that it will complicate the situation in the country.

The SLM-AW and the JEM today joined the calls for delaying the vote. "Any elections held now under these circumstances will be deemed meaningless and will not achieve the desired outcome of stabilizing country and transforming into to a democratic one," Al-Nur told Sudan Tribune today.

"The Government firm control over media, security and financial resources obviously gives it an unfair advantage and it is very clear that the NEC is not conducting its work in a fair and transparent manner. The insecurity in Darfur also makes it impossible to hold elections there" he added.

The SLM chief called for forming an interim government "to prepare the country for elections and work on resolving the conflict in Darfur by enforcing security, removing the new settlers and return the land to its rightful owners and work on a political solution, implement all clauses contained in the CPA particularly the rights of Southerners to have a referendum".

JEM, which is currently engaged in peace talks with Khartoum, echoed Al-Nur's call saying that the "bare minimum standards" for holding them should exist stressing that the bulk of Darfuri population has not been registered in the census or the voter registration process.

"Excluding [Darfuris] from participation in shaping the future of their country through the ballot box at this critical juncture of the history of the country would weaken their sense of belonging, and works to amplify the voice of the advocates of self-determination for Darfur" according to a statement signed by JEM spokesperson Ahmed Hussein Adam.

JEM slammed the "arrogance" of the NCP in dealing with other political powers saying it does not help building the "national consensus".

"Holding elections in April places obstacles before the peace talks process, and in particular the power sharing portion. Prioritizing the conducting of elections over achieving peace offers conclusive evidence that the NCP does give much care to peace, and unable to depart from the selfish interests of party loyalty to the supreme national interest".

Carter Center pledges to refrain from political work

SUNA 30/3/10 – NCP official Qotbi Al-Mahdi announced that Carter Center has affirmed its commitment to carry out its monitoring role over the election process scheduled to begin next week in Sudan and to refrain from media work. He said the Centre would not interfere or speculate winners until the end of the process.

In a press statement Tuesday after his meeting with officials of Carter Center at the National Congress, Al-Mahdi said that the meeting was a continuation to former meetings, explaining that the center declared its commitment to play the role expected from it, to keep away from any political activities and to be confined to the monitoring process.

Violence fears as election approaches – the view from Unity

IRIN 29/3/10 - Tension is mounting as elections approach in Sudan, with analysts, candidates and voters concerned about potential violence in flashpoint areas in the South.

“We are worried for what happens when the votes are announced,” said former soldier William Kong at an election rally in Bentiu, capital of the oil-rich Southern Unity state.

“People have become so excited for the person they support that I fear there will be problems if they find out they have lost.”

The election, the first multi-party ballot for 24 years, will pitch the ex-rebel turned ruling party in the South, the Sudan Peoples’ Liberation Movement (SPLM), against former enemies in the North, the National Congress Party (NCP).

Across the semi-autonomous south, several erstwhile key supporters of the SPLM have rejected the party’s nominees, running instead as independent candidates for the powerful state governor posts, as well as for national, regional and state assembly seats.

“Security is a real issue, and a major concern,” said Angelina Teny, who is running as an independent candidate for the governorship of Unity.

“We have called on all our supporters not to react if they are provoked,” Teny added. “If there is a problem, then they should go to authorities, not respond to violence with violence.”

Teny’s husband, Riek Machar, is Southern Vice-President and a deputy chairman of the SPLM - highlighting the complexity of the election campaigns.

Loyalties are often based along ethnic or clan lines, while rivalries from the civil war run deep: an estimated two million people were killed in a conflict fuelled by religion, ethnicity, ideology and resources.

“People are not used to choosing a leader peacefully or giving up power without a fight,” said Stephen Madit, a teacher in Bentiu.

Despite supporting the SPLM for Southern president, Madit said he would vote NCP for national president, to ensure the two signatories to the CPA remain in power.

It is a pragmatic approach many in the South seem to support - for fear of possible fresh conflict if the power balance changed.

“Keeping the CPA secure is our main concern until we get the referendum,” he said, referring to the vote in Southern Sudan on potential full independence slated for January 2011.

Positive steps have been taken by the signing of an electoral code of conduct by 26 key political parties, including both the NCP and the SPLM. Nine independent Southern candidates contesting governorships have also signed the deal.

The code commits all signatories “to abide by electoral laws, to promote a fair electoral contest, and to refrain from all forms of violence and obstruction of other contestants”. But concern remains how far documents signed by leaders will control supporters on the ground.

In Bentiu, the incumbent governor Taban Deng Gai has military forces under his direct command, according to local and UN sources.

Fighting broke out in Bentiu in October 2009 between troops loyal to the governor and forces supporting Paulino Matip, a former militia leader who joined the SPLA as its deputy commander.

A gaping hole still lies in his compound in Bentiu, where a tank crashed through its wall during the fighting, in which at least 16 people were killed.

"If the governor [Gai] lost, he would not give up without a fight," said Gabriel Madeng, a student.

"There is a lot at stake," he added, pointing out that the state earns a 2 percent cut of oil pumped from its soil, worth around a million dollars a month, according to finance ministry figures.

But people are angry at the perceived slow pace of development. "Not enough has been done, so we say it is time for a change," Madeng said.

Levels of violence are already high in the South, with more than 450 people killed and 40,000 displaced since January, according to the Office of the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Southern Sudan.

Last year, more than 2,500 people were killed and almost 400,000 displaced across the south.

"April's elections could aggravate this already tense situation," the advocacy group Enough warned in a 16 March report.

It cited deep concerns for disarmament efforts led by the Southern military in areas feared to have the greatest potential for election-related violence.

"Despite efforts to improve upon past disarmament disasters, current campaigns in Central Equatoria, Jonglei, and Lakes state have directly led to violence and casualties among civilians and the army," the report said.

On a more hopeful note, Sudan's media in both regions has largely avoided inciting violence.

"The number of explicit episodes of hate speech observed for this reporting period appeared relatively low and limited in scope," stated a report by the Sudan Media and Elections consortium, a group of national and international organizations, following an assessment from 13 February to 7 March.

"Most of the cases monitored were related to a vehement style of campaigning and confrontation between the main contestants, rather than on targeted calls to violence and discrimination," added the consortium, which is funded by the UN Development Programme (UNDP).

But tensions are high, and elders and church leaders have made repeated calls for calm.

"It took the Sudanese people more than two decades to achieve peace," said Paulino Lukudu Loro, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Juba, speaking to crowds in a recent sermon.

"I urge the Sudanese masses and God-fearing people to work to maintain peace during the campaign and election period."

Other Highlights

One civilian killed, five injured in armed attack in Abyei

In a dramatic development, one resident was killed and five were injured, two seriously, in an attack reportedly launched by armed Messeriya youth on Merial Ajak village north of Abyei Area, according to **Akhbar Al-Youm**. Reportedly, SPLM spokesperson Wuor Majak accused Abyei Deputy Chief Administrator Rahama Al-Nur of inciting the Misseriya youth to attack the Dinka, adding their threat to expel the UN troops from the area was unacceptable.

EU bans Sudan, Philippine airlines; clears TAAG

Reuters 30/3/10 - The European Union eased its ban on airlines from Angola on Tuesday and vowed to block carriers from Sudan and the Philippines from starting flights to the 27-country bloc.

The European Commission, which manages the blacklist, said TAAG Angola Airlines had improved and could bring specific aircraft into the whole EU under strict conditions. But other Angolan airlines remain banned until the national authorities beef up their oversight.

"We cannot accept that airlines fly into the EU if they do not fully comply with international safety standards," European Transport Commissioner Siim Kallas said in a statement.

The Commission said it had imposed an operating ban on all Sudanese carriers, because the national authority continually failed to meet international safety standards, and it was closely monitoring those from Egypt.

The Commission acknowledged efforts made by Philippine authorities and airlines to improve standards, but said it would ban them from the EU as a precaution.

North Korea's Air Koryo, been banned since 2006, is allowed to resume flights with its two safest aircraft.

Iran Air faces restrictions after European experts found evidence of "serious incidents and accidents suffered by the carrier".

Shock in Sudan over remarks attributed to Bashir on Darfur Women rape

Sudan Tribune website 30/3/10 — The Sudanese government maintained silence on a disclosure made by Islamist opposition leader Hassan Al-Turabi relating to a remark made by president Omer Hassan Al-Bashir before a national commission of inquiry established in 2004 to investigate alleged right abuses in Darfur.

A video posted to the You Tube website showed Turabi addressing audience in Al-Hajj Yusuf area east of Khartoum at an unspecified date this month talking about Bashir's indictment last year by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Darfur.

"The UN Security Council for which you are a member said this [Darfur] case should be referred [to ICC] and you were cooperating [with ICC] and you were happy saying yes take it to the court, I am sure the court won't find anything....Once it reached [Bashir] him, Ocampo [ICC

prosecutor] was received here, [they] honored him; three years his [Ocampo] teams were working [inside Sudan]," Al-Turabi said

"Even the Sudanese commission did the same thing. One senior [member] from the commission, without naming him, said after we were sworn in [before Bashir] we sat down with the person that we took the oath before him, you know who is," he added.

"He [Bashir] told us, [if] this Gharbawia [Darfuri woman], when a Ja'ali [man from the Arab Ja'al tribe] man humps her, is this an honor or rape?"

The commission member according to the Turabi told him that "his hair stood on end" when heard Bashir's comment and was speechless.

"I swear to you in the name of god this story was told to me [by someone] I know very well" the Popular Congress Party (PCP) leader said.

The video of Turabi was widely circulated amid shock and disbelief on a racially sensitive topic.

One political observer in Khartoum who asked not to be named told Sudan tribune that Bashir's "pride in his Ja'ali heritage may have prompted this unwise remark before the commission".

"President Bashir says many things publicly that do not suit a leader of a country so he may be even more daring privately but Turabi also has motives to lie. Either way if the [Sudanese presidency] does not step in to deny this thing could grow like a snowball out of control" he said.

Turabi was Bashir's close political and religious ally since the 1989 coup until they split in a bitter power struggle in 1999-2000. Since then he has been in and out of jail but was released along with all other political prisoners after a north-south peace deal in 2005.

He was the one of few political leaders in the country to publicly call on Bashir to surrender himself to the ICC. The Sudanese president is accused by ICC prosecutors masterminding a campaign to wipe out the Fur, Masaalit and Zaghawa African ethnic groups in Darfur.