



# Popular Consultations in Blue Nile State

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What are “popular consultations”?

Popular consultations are a mechanism to determine how the people of Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile states feel about Comprehensive Peace Agreement implementation in their states. The process, conducted through their democratically elected legislatures, will look at issues like power and wealth sharing as well as security in determining if any further actions are needed.

### How did the process get started?

According to the CPA and the Popular Consultation Act, a state parliamentary commission must be set up immediately after state legislative assembly members were elected to assess and evaluate CPA implementation.

In Blue Nile State, a Popular Consultation Parliamentary Commission (PCPC) was established on 18 September 2010 at a closed session of the Legislative Council. The State Assembly passed legislation approving the establishment of the PCPC as an independent body, prohibiting any other body to intervene in its work or limit its powers.

### Who sits on the popular consultation commission?

The PCPC has 21 members -- 13 from the National Congress Party (NCP) and eight from the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), including 8 women. This composition was achieved through consensus between the

NCP and SPLM parliamentary caucuses.

The chairman of the PCPC is Sirag Hassan Attaelmanan (NCP MP) and its secretary Mussa Kenji (SPLM MP, former commissioner of Kurmuk).

### What will the commission do?

The commission will carry out the popular consultation process. It will gather opinions from the people of the state, political parties, and civil society organizations through forums, conferences and questionnaires. It will then prepare and submit a report on the results of popular consultations to the state assembly within three months of its establishment.

### How has the commission prepared for popular consultations?

It drew up an overall framework document, programme and budget with assistance from the Federal Research and Consultation Centre (FRCC). The framework document contains criteria for evaluating and assessing the CPA Protocol (pertaining to Blue Nile) in the areas of economics, politics, state constitution and administration.

The PCPC was divided into nine committees. Four of these are main committees addressing constitutional, political, economic and administrative areas, while the five others are support committees dealing with civic education, opinion-taking, media, international

non-governmental organizations (INGOs), international cooperation and capacity building.

The NCP is leading the administrative and the economic committees, while the SPLM is heading up the constitutional and political ones.

The PCPC then developed a work plan, which included training its members on their roles in the process as well as technicalities of collecting opinions in localities. This was followed by an awareness workshop for members of parliament (MPs), the media and political parties on procedural consultation issues. The Federal Research Consultation Centre conducted the training.

On 5 January, inauguration of popular consultations took place. More than 300 people attended the celebration in Ed Damazin, most of whom were SPLM supporters.

### **What were the so-called try-out hearings?**

“Try out Citizens Hearings” which were just a practice run for the actual event. They took place in Ed Damazin on 12 December and the next day in Roseires, facilitated by AECOM. The hearings were chaired by PCPC Chairman Siraj Attaelmanan and attended by PCPC members, political parties and Carter Center observers.

Some 200 people attended the try-out hearings in Ed Damazin, with 100 expressing their opinions. In Roseires, 180 persons expressed their opinions out of a total 700 present. Each person was given five minutes to speak.

Participants, who were mainly women, were active and willing to express their opinions. PCPC members said that men were reluctant to express their opinions for fear of losing their jobs.

### **The PCPC should have submitted its report on popular consultations three months after it was established in September. What delayed the process?**

A delay in funding for the process affected the timeliness for submission of the report, which expired on 17 December.

In a press conference on 11 November, PCPC Chairman Sirag Hamad Attaelman asked the Legislative Assembly to extend the three-month period stipulated in the popular consultation act due to lack of funding. After meeting with members of the Three Areas Working Group, the Chairman expressed hope that donors would provide financial support for conducting popular consultations in Blue Nile and later in Southern Kordofan States.

It was announced on 29 December that the PCPC had received grants from the central and state governments and AECOM for the public hearings.

No funding has yet been provided for the work of the PCPC.

### **What was the new date set for the hearings? How are they set up?**

The hearings began on 14 January and will run until 2 February. The PCPC established more than 100 centres for hearing and collecting public opinion in the six localities of Blue Nile (three in each constituency). The hearings allow Blue Nile citizens to express opinions at six forums held in different locales each day.

Upon completion of the hearings, the PCPC will conduct consultations for professionals, specialized sectors, political parties and other organizations.

### **What is the PCPC doing during the hearings?**

The PCPC was divided into six teams for the hearings. Each team includes two PCPC members, members of the legislative assembly involved in the process and 15 additional people, who are serving as secretaries, logistic officers, and security personnel.

AECOM funded the establishment of an Information Processing Centre -- a spacious place equipped with 22 computers and operators who have been trained to process the data from the public hearings on daily basis.

### **Who are the main people taking part in the exercise?**

The PCPC is targeting all layers of society, various occupations, NGOs, women and political parties as well as local and native administration.

There are consultations at different levels, including state, locality, community and village. It is the democratic right for all people in Blue Nile to actively participate and freely express their views on whether the CPA has met their aspirations in Blue Nile State.

It has been agreed among all political parties and civil society organizations in Blue Nile that consultations should be transparent, inclusive, participatory, social and consensus-building.

The chairman and secretary have stated that popular consultations would be

considered credible and successful for the state if the PCPC succeeded in collecting opinions of citizens representing at least half of the state's population.

### **How was the public informed about the hearings?**

Popular consultations were well-communicated through the media and locality commissioners. Political parties and NGOs were invited to monitor the process.

However, during pilot try-out hearings in Damazin and Roseires on 12 and 13 December, PCPC members discovered that many people were unaware of the consultations, despite extensive civic education carried out by AECOM, the High Technical Committee and NGOs. The PCPC decided to allocate the first hour and half of public hearings for civic education awareness on popular consultations and the CPA during consultation sessions.

### **What challenges has the PCPC faced?**

Some of its main challenges were the tight time schedule and lack of funding as well as logistical support. Only AECOM, funded by USAID, assisted the PCPC with rent for its premises as well as furniture, and funded civic education activities in Blue Nile through community organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The NCP chairman stated clearly that

funding for the PCPC must be provided from the state budget, which is fully supported by the national government. The PCPC submitted its request for funding to the state assembly and addressed the governor, Malik Agar, who promised to provide funding from the state budget. It later became clear that funding was not available from the national Ministry of Finance.

Another serious problem creating difficulties for PCPC operations was a lack of vehicles for PCPC members, especially women, for travel to localities and Ed Damazin (the state capital) to attend Commission sessions. The majority of PCPC members are from the six localities of Blue Nile.

### **How have the parties coordinated in holding the consultations? How will they implement any final decisions?**

A technical committee with equal members from both CPA parties was formed to guide civic education for popular consultations in Blue Nile. The PCPC is coordinating all issues related to popular consultations, as stipulated in the CPA and the Popular Consultation Act.

### **How do the two political parties view popular consultations?**

The NCP and SPLM differ to some degree in their views on popular consultations.

The SPLM feels that popular consultations might achieve a higher level of decentralization through self-

determination and wider autonomy and also provide an opportunity to use Blue Nile's rich, natural resources. It has vast, arable lands suitable for growing crops like cotton, sunflowers, wheat and sorghum as well as numerous minerals and ores. The state also has rich water resources and the Roseires hydro-station.

The NCP considers popular consultations a right for citizens provided by the CPA to achieve a better future for Blue Nile and a balance between the state and centre. The NCP does not agree with the idea of "self determination" and "wider autonomy" because the state cannot provide revenues sufficient for the salaries of state and local authorities or the provision of public services. These have been fully supported by the national government in the last five years.

The two political parties are working together to overcome their differences and come out with a unified position on the aims of popular consultations.

### **Are other political parties involved in the consultations?**

The Political Party's Forum in Blue Nile includes 11 political parties, including the Popular Congress Party (PCP), the Sudan Communist Party (SCP), the National Umma Party (NUP), the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), and the North and South Funj party (NSF). The National Congress Party (NCP) has joined the forum recently.

Wishing to play an active role in the process, political parties in Blue Nile held

a meeting with the PCPC to discuss the work and modalities of popular consultations. Through their local branches, they began preparing the local population for PCPC tours after 20 November.

### **What have the parties done to support popular consultations?**

On 25 November, the SPLM and other parties conducted a peaceful demonstration to support implementation of popular consultations. The 300 demonstrators delivered a letter to the PCPC, the Legislative Council, State Governor Malik Agar, Carter Center observers and UNMIS.

Demonstration speeches focused on popular consultations as a democratic right of Blue Nile people. The demonstrators were carrying banners with such slogans as “Popular Consultation is our Future”, “Popular Consultation is a Democratic Right of the People of Blue Nile”, “Popular Consultation is the Responsibility of the State Assembly”.

On 21 and 22 December, political parties held public rallies in Ed Damazin and Roseires as part of the popular consultation civic awareness campaign. Speakers conveyed a unified message to the audience to state their opinions on the CPA clearly, comparing promises made in the agreement to their daily life and reality.

Some 12 political parties who had signed a Code of Conduct to work together for raising awareness on popular

consultations through civic education paid a visit to Bout Locality on 30 December 2010. They explained that consultations are a democratic right and mechanism to ascertain the views of Blue Nile people on whether the CPA had fulfilled their development.

### **What about NGOs in Blue Nile?**

On 1 September, Blue Nile University Peace Center and the High Committee for Civic Education, funded by USAID through AECOM, conducted a workshop on popular consultations to train trainers, which was attended by 150 participants from localities, including 30 members of the Legislative Council.

The High Civic Education Committee conducted a civic education workshop on popular consultations for 50 participants of the Ministry of Social Welfare in Ed Damazin on 23 September. Ministry of State Affairs Commissioner El Hadi Yosif encouraged ministry staff to assist in raising awareness among Blue Nile people on popular consultations.

Mercy Corps Scotland, in collaboration with the National Democratic Institute (NDI), is involved in civic education on popular consultations in partnership with seven community organizations in Ed Damazin and nine community organizations in Kurmuk and Yabus. The NDI in Kurmuk conducted a popular consultation campaign from 25 September to 10 October for more than 4,500 participants.

### **What will happen if opinions are negative about the CPA?**

If the state legislature decides that the CPA has not met the hopes of the people of Blue Nile State, it shall deliberate to point out the shortcomings in detail. The legislature will then negotiate with the national government to rectify shortcomings in the constitutional, political, administrative and economical arrangements within the framework of the CPA to ensure faithful implementation of the agreement.

### **What is UNMIS' role in the consultation process?**

The Popular Consultation Act has invited the international community, including the United Nations, to supervise the consultations. The process is one of the most important milestones in CPA implementation in Blue Nile State.

UNMIS Civil Affairs in Blue Nile conducted a series of workshops on CPA implementation and popular consultations in 2009-2010 in Blue Nile for state and local administrations, political parties, tribal leaders, NGOs, civil society and UN agencies to raise public awareness.

The mission has been closely monitoring and reporting on developments of popular consultations through daily meetings and following up with key players involved in the process – the state government, state legislature, PCPC members, political parties, the High Technical Committee, INGOs, AECOM and civil society.

UNMIS facilitated trips to Kurmuk and

Geissan during the second week of December 2010 for 13 members of the High Technical Committee for civic education awareness on popular consultations. The mission is also arranging special flights for 31 January to Bout, Tadamon locality and 2 February to Geissan for PCPC members to attend public hearings.

Some 150 copies of the CPA have been donated by UNMIS' Public Information Office to the PCPC for their civic education campaign and consultations in localities.

### **How have the consultations been going?**

Interest in the process has varied depending on locality. For instance, Adbelkhalag hearing center in Tadamon drew only 50-60 participants, while other forums have been attended by 300-700 people. On 24 January, no one was found at the Roseires Ed Dakhla (35 kilometres south of Roseires) and only one person at the Ed Damazin Rabie area in the afternoon the same day.

Figures presented by the PCPC information officer tell us that some 180 people daily have expressed their opinions all over the state (30 per locality on average). All citizens above 18 have the right to express their opinions. The population of Blue Nile is 832,112, of which 403,774 are above the age of 17.

As per these figures, only 1,600 have expressed their opinions, which comes to below 0.5 per cent of eligible speakers.

This does not show a high interest in popular consultations. Some people do not believe that the process will bring substantial changes to their lives or have fears about expressing their opinions.

*For actual opinions expressed in different localities, see “Popular Consultation Hearings”.*

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