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Media Monitoring Report

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Voting Watch: Day 1

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Highlights

Heavy turnout in first hours of Sudan balloting

KUNA 11/4/10 - - Balloting stations witnessed a heavy turnout in the first few hours of voting on Sunday, as Sudanese voters went to cast their ballots in multi-party elections for the first time in quarter of a century.

The process was not without snags, where some constituents complained of complicated procedures and identification, and others failed to find their names listed on the voters' registry.

"The electoral commission is saying that the average time for a constituent to cast his or her ballot is three minutes, but it is taking more than ten minutes so far. At this rate, three days will not be enough for everyone to vote," said Talal Al-Tayeb, a voter in northern Khartoum.

He noted that many people did not understand the voting procedures and were holding others up, adding that many of the elderly found it difficult to gain access to balloting stations.

Meanwhile, voter Khalid Al-Fakki from southern Khartoum said that there was a good turnout in his area, and expected that number would increase after regular work hours were over.

Bashir votes in Sudan polls

The Sydney Morning Herald 11/4/10 - Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir voted on Sunday in the first multi-party polls of his two-decade rule, but the election was marred by an opposition boycott, fraud allegations and logistical problems.

Bashir, wearing a traditional white robe and turban, raised his index finger to show the voting ink and shouted "Allahu Akbar" (God is greatest) after casting his ballot at the St. Francis school in central Khartoum.

Polling stations opened for the three-day vote on schedule in Khartoum at 08:00 (0500 GMT) but election organisers in several areas were still unwrapping ballot boxes as the queues began to form, an AFP correspondent said.

Streets of the capital however were quiet as witnesses reported a slow start to the polls, in which Sudanese are to choose their president as well as local and legislative representatives. Southerners are also voting for the leader of the semi-autonomous government of south Sudan. Some women waited around in classrooms of a school in Khartoum until logistical problems were resolved.

In the southern capital of Juba, southern leader Salva Kiir, who said he was casting his ballot for the first time in his life, told reporters he hoped the elections would lead to the "formation of a democratic process in south Sudan."

The leader of the former southern rebel Sudan People's Liberation Movement is running against former foreign minister Lam Akol for the leadership of the semi-autonomous government of south Sudan.

Bashir, who has ruled Africa's largest country since 1989 when he came to power in a military coup backed by Islamists, is expected to secure a comfortable win after the pullout of his key

challengers.

Darfur rebel movements, who control parts of the vast region, firmly rejected the elections but have so far not stated any intentions to derail the process.

While the result of the presidential poll holds little suspense, elections for parliamentary and local representatives are still fiercely competitive in many parts of the country. Election organisers rushed on Saturday to get ballot papers to remoter parts of the country.

Sixteen airplanes, 16 helicopters and more than 2,000 vehicles have been mobilised in the past two weeks to transport ballot boxes around the country.

More than 100,000 police officers will be on duty over the election period, a security official said, as embassies in Khartoum advised their nationals to adopt "precautionary measures" such as stocking up on food and fuel.

Voting begins in Sudan's historic elections

AP 11/4/10 - Three days of voting began Sunday in Sudan's first competitive elections in nearly a quarter century despite repeated opposition calls to delay the vote.

In Khartoum, turnout was lighter than expected in the first few hours of voting, aside from a few enthusiastic supporters of President Omar al-Bashir.

The elections, which will run through Tuesday, are an essential part of a 2005 peace deal that ended the north-south war that killed 2 million people over 21 years. They are designed to kick-start a democratic transformation in the war-plagued nation and provide a democratically elected government to prepare for a crucial southern referendum next year.

But two major political parties, including the southerners, decided to pull out fully or partially from the race, saying the process lacks credibility and elections can't be held in the western Darfur region while under a state of emergency. They called for a delay of the vote to address their concerns. The government refused.

More than 800 international observers descended on Africa's largest country to observe the fairness of the contests, with the largest group from former U.S. President Jimmy Carter's organization. He toured a polling station at the start of the day.

"I think (opposition parties) want to see a peaceful transition and peace in this country, so I don't think there is any party that is threatening at all any disturbance or violence or intimidation of voters," he told reporters. "So we do expect and hopeful and believe there will be a peaceful election."

The opposition has made a series of complaints -- that the National Election Commission is biased to the government, the ruling party has used state resources in the campaign, the number of polling stations nationwide was cut in half from 20,000, making it harder for those in remote villages to cast ballots.

"This is the first time that the party that carried out a coup organizes elections," said Sarah Nugdallah, the head of the political bureau of the Umma party, a major northern opposition group which is boycotting.

Some 16 million people will vote for over 14,000 candidates for everything from president to local councils.

Voting took place amid heavy security and police have issued stern warnings that no disturbances will be tolerated on Election Day. Though the day is not a holiday, many shops in Khartoum were closed Sunday.

In the ravaged western Darfur region, rebels have called for a boycott of the election since a state of emergency exists and fighting continues.

Since 2003, this vast arid region has been the scene of a bloody conflict between the Arab-led government in Khartoum and ethnic African rebels. At least 300,000 have been killed and millions driven from their homes in a war that was marked by atrocities by pro-government Arab militias against Darfur villagers.

The ruling party, however, still campaigned strongly in the three provinces of the region, holding large campaign rallies up until the last minute.

Election posters lined the few paved roads of the regional capital of al-Fasher, showing pictures of al-Bashir, the "strong and honest leader," and inciting voters to choose the "powerful party."

Voting begins despite delays in some areas

Miraya FM 11/4/10 - Around 16,500,000 eligible voters all over Sudan have begun flocking in polling centers today to cast their votes at the executive and legislative levels, amid partial or complete boycott of elections by a number of political parties. The National Elections Commission (NEC) stated that all preparations are complete throughout 13,000 polling centers.

Miraya correspondents across the country reported that most polling centers have opened for citizens to cast their votes. However, in Malakal, Upper Nile State, the opening of some polling centers was delayed while queues began to form.

Also, the White Nile High Elections Committee decided to delay the beginning of voting in the State to 12 noon today. Speaking to Miraya the head of the Committee, Salah Juha, explained that centers were not fully prepared. Citizens on the other hand said they found contradictions in the voters' lists as some names were duplicated while others were missing. Problems were also noted in South Kordofan State where ballot boxes were still unopened in several centers due to duplications in voters' lists.

Confusion was also seen at other centers. Miraya's correspondent in Al Gadarif said that the Chairman of the Sudanese Ba'ath Party, Ibrahim Mahmoud, complained to the State High Elections Committee about his party symbol missing from the elections' list, despite being approved by the National Elections Commission (NEC). He added that his party may withdraw from the electoral process and raise a law suit unless the NEC resolves the issue.

The Chairman of the Southern Sudan High Elections Committee, Anthony Ariki, confirmed completion of preparations in all the States to conduct the voting, however he admitted that some States like Western Equatoria are in short of election materials. He said that efforts are being made to deliver the materials on time.

The Head of the National Elections Commission, (NEC) Abel Alier, said that NEC has carried out its work with high professionalism. He said that all accusations doubting the commission's impartiality are untrue. Alier further called on citizens to actively participate in today's polls and to refrain from violence.

The Governor of Khartoum State, Abdelrahman al-Khadr, denied circulated rumors about the

imposition of a curfew during the elections, adding that security arrangements are all put in place.

Meanwhile, Western embassies in Khartoum have advised their citizens to adopt precautionary measures like stocking food, and filling their cars with gasoline in the event of demonstrations that may occur during the polls.

The Spokesperson of Southern Sudan High Elections Security Committee, Maj. Gen. Jackson Elia, has said that large number of police forces was deployed across the southern States to secure the polling centers and maintain order. He further urged the citizens to cooperate with police and report any security threats.

The Deputy Inspector General of Southern Sudan Police, Lt. Gen. Gordon Kur Micah, has told Miraya that 12,000 trained police forces have been deployed across Southern Sudan states.

Polling faced problems on the first day

Al-Rakoba website 11/4/10 – Polling stations encountered some problems when the process kicked off today. One of the problems is that location of a voter name takes five minutes because the NEC did not publish the electoral rolls. The voter also requires between 5 to 10 minutes casting his vote. The NEC estimated that location of the name and voting would take less than 4 minutes but the process is actually taking almost 15 minutes. In some cities voters discovered mistakes in the symbols of candidates and a mix up of names leading to the halt of the polling pending solution of these problems. Another problem is that the ballot papers for Kosti were transported to Giteina but the problem was solved.

Sudan polling begins

Al-Jazeera TV 11/4/10 (live coverage of Sudan's elections) – Sudan's polling began amid tight security measures but voters complained that the process is complicated due to the existence of many ballot papers needed to be cast by a voter. According to the Channel, SPLM supporters were also confused due to conflicting signals over boycott of elections in the North. Reportedly, the turnout in Darfur is low and is apparently due to security concerns.

Update: Al-Jazeera TV 11/4/10 (live coverage of Sudan's elections) – In Khartoum polling is proceeding in a normal way but some technical errors were reported such as missing symbols and names. In Darfur, the process is also progressing amid rumours that some Sheikhs were reportedly urging voters not cast their votes. In Southern Sudan, the turnout is reportedly high.

Elections in South Sudan start amid concerns over violence

Xinhua 11/4/10 - Voting process of Sudan's general elections on Sunday began in South Sudan which has over 4 million registered voters amid concerns over violence. President of the Government of South Sudan and President of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), Salva Kiir Mayardit, cast his ballot at a voting center in Juba, the capital city of the region, marking the beginning of the voting process in the region.

However, the empty streets in Juba reflected a sense of cautious anticipation towards the elections which are taking place in a region suffered from war for more than 20 years.

Last week, foreigners in Juba and other southern Sudanese cities started to leave for their home countries.

Most of these foreigners were Ugandans, Kenyans and Ethiopians, who have flocked in large numbers to South Sudan after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in

2005 and improvement of living conditions in the region, in addition to Europeans and Americans working in the humanitarian field and private companies.

"We have noticed that they began to return to their countries for fear of the elections," Gier Chuang, minister of internal affairs in the government of South Sudan, told Xinhua.

"These foreigners, namely the Africans from neighboring countries, still have in their memories the violent events which accompanied the elections took place in their own countries... but they do not know the matter in Sudan is different," he said.

Voting is preceding smoothly -Carter

Miraya FM 11/4/10 - Former US president, Jimmy Carter whose Carter Center is monitoring the vote in Sudan said on the first day of elections that "despite minor problems voting is proceeding smoothly." He said that if the winners and losers accept the results in good faith, then it will be a good foundation for the interim period until next year when the Southern Sudan referendum is scheduled to take place.

Carter and his delegation are due to travel to Juba, South Sudan, tomorrow to observe the elections there.

Sudan starts historic vote, security tight

Reuters 11/4/10 - Hundreds of thousands of Sudanese queued up to start voting on Sunday, in historic elections already marred by allegations of fraud that will test the fragile unity of a nation divided by decades of civil conflict.

There were chaotic scenes at some polling centres - south Sudan's president Salva Kiir had to wait 20 minutes under a tree for his voting station to open in the southern capital Juba and ended up spoiling his first ballot by putting it in the wrong box.

Queues started forming in the morning in Khartoum, where the streets were unusually quiet amid a heavy police presence and there were reports of delays in other areas.

Sudan's police said they would deploy 100,000 officers across northern Sudan to guard polling stations and ward off unrest during three days of voting to choose a national president, a leader for the semi-autonomous south, assemblies and governors.

Cautious calm in streets in Khartoum, police on maximum alert

Al-Ahdath reports cautious calm in streets in Khartoum, saying police personnel have been deployed and were placed on maximum alert to secure the process. According to the paper, an Interior Ministry source has downplayed talk about possible elections rigging.

Meanwhile, Khartoum has rejected charges by the Human Rights Watch that Sudan's elections would not be free and fair. A Government source said Sudan's elections would deal a blow to the credibility of the HR Watch.

Al-Mahdi, Arman calls for voting boycott

Al-Sahafa reports that while National Umma Party leader Sadiq Al-Mahdi has warned that the conduct of elections at this point in time would increase the existing tension between the regime and the international community and would be part of the problem rather than the solution, the SPLM leading figure Yasir Arman has called for polling boycott, saying the process in its present form "could lead to a massacre". Al-Mahdi and Arman made the remarks after meeting

with ex-US President Carter. However, NCP candidate for president Omer Al-Bashir said elections would be conducted in a "transparent manner and in line with laws".

Elections material still missing in 4 polling centers in Warrap

Miraya FM 11/4/10 - Heads of four polling centers of Gogrial East County in Warrap State said they have not yet received identity cards and vests. Head of Lietnhom Polling Center, Joseph Longar Atem, said the center did not receive materials which could help them be identified by voters and those monitoring the elections.

Carter hopes Sudan elections meet international standards

Sudan Tribune website 10/4/10— Following a meeting with President Omer Al-Bashir on Saturday the former US President Jimmy Carter said he hopes that Sudan's elections, set to begin on Sunday, would meet international standards.

"I hope that it will be completely compatible with international standards and safe and free and fair and that the decision of individual voters will be expressed freely without intimidation," said the founder of Carter Center which is monitoring the three-day vote.

Carter further voiced hope the results of the election will be counted "honestly and fairly." These are "very troubled potential times (but) we hope it will be safe and free," Carter said.

Over 16 million Sudanese will go to polls today

Local dailies report that over 16,500 million Sudanese voters across the country will go to polls today to cast their votes in 10,751 polling stations. According to **Al-Raed**, the NEC told a press conference yesterday that the process is monitored by the Carter Centre, EU, US-based Foreign Policy Analysis, AU, IGAD, Arab League, OIC, Embassies as well as 20278 local observers.

Meanwhile, NCP candidate for president Omer Al-Bashir will cast his vote today at 12:30 noon at St. Francis School in Khartoum.

Sudan set for historic vote, security tight

Reuters 11/4/10 - President Omar al-Bashir will deploy 100,000 police across northern Sudan to guard polling stations and ward off unrest during three days of voting to choose a president, a head of the semi-autonomous south, parliaments and local leaders.

Bashir ... seems certain to win another four-year term after leading opposition parties pulled out of the race. "We know that there are no perfect elections, and these polls will not be an exception to that rule," said Abdallah Ahmed Abdallah, a top official at Sudan's electoral commission. "These elections will not suddenly transform Sudan into a democratic society. That will take time and experience."

Yet opposition groups and activists say even such modest expectations will go unmet as they put forward myriad complaints of vote-rigging and other misdeeds, fuelling doubts about the credibility of Sudan's first multi-party polls in 24 years.

It also raises questions about whether the vote will help or hurt Sudan as it seeks to end years of multiple civil conflicts.

"All that is left is the announcement of (Bashir's) victory, which will be the grave of democratic transformation with the support and the participation of the international and regional

community," Sudanese civil society group Democracy First said in a statement. If the polls are seen as illegitimate, it may bode poorly for plans to hold a 2011 referendum on independence for southern Sudan. If next year's vote does not take place, the south may secede anyway.

Streets of the capital Khartoum were unusually quiet, possibly because pre-election tensions may have eased with expectations of a victory for Bashir, who took power in a 1989 coup.

The risk of unrest is greater in western Darfur, where the United Nations estimates 300,000 people have died since 2003 in a humanitarian crisis that Washington has labeled genocide. Aid groups moved international and Sudanese staff out of remote areas to the region's three state capitals. "We're not expecting widespread violence, only things that might blow up in pockets," an aid official told Reuters, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"Everyone is prepared to hibernate if there is any trouble ... People have stocked up their houses with food and water."

Some aid agencies said they moved their staff from other remote areas, like South Kordofan and parts of southern Sudan, where any emergency evacuations would be hampered by poor roads.

According to an internal UN memo seen by Reuters, UN staff were advised to avoid large gatherings and refrain from field missions during the voting period.

Some of the thousands of Kenyan and Ugandan workers living in Juba, the capital of southern Sudan, paid double the normal ticket price to board buses to leave town.

In Khartoum, bus companies added vehicles as a huge number of residents poured out of the city, some of them fearing possible election reprisals and others simply happy to take advantage of the three-day election to visit home villages.

"I was scared, but now that these (opposition) guys have withdrawn there's no competition with Bashir," said Khartoum housewife Atouma Hassan.

"So now I'm just waiting for them to announce there's a holiday."

Sudan opposition criticizes international election observers

Sudan Tribune website 9/4/10 — A Sudanese opposition leader today criticized international election observers saying that they are resorting to "concealment" under intimidation from the NCP leading to overlooking major flaws and discrepancies in the process.

The Umma Reform and Renewal Party (URRP) leader Mubarak Al-Fadil said at a press conference alongside SPLM deputy Secretary General Yasir Arman today that the presence of foreign observers such as Carter Center and the European Union (EU) will contribute to granting legitimacy to the elections and enforcement of the status quo.

Al-Fadil further said that the observers did not disclose that the National Election Commission (NEC) refused to allow them to verify the voters records adding that it has not been printed until now because names are still added to it.

Al-Fadil and Arman slammed the NCP, NEC and UN saying that they are partners in the "fraud process" at the elections. He added that the ruling party has intimidated the observers against trying to unveil any irregularities...

Carter says satisfied with Sudan's electoral board

Sudan Tribune website 9/4/10 - Former US President Jimmy Carter Friday said satisfied with the job done by the NEC despite the challenges facing Sunday polling.

Following a meeting held with the electoral board, the former US president told reports that the NEC members gave him satisfactory explanations with regard to the transportation of electoral material to the polling stations. "It is a very challenging election, because Sudan has not held elections since 1986," he said, adding "The NEC's (officials) have done their best under these circumstances".

NEC Deputy Chairman, Abdallah Ahmed Abdallah, affirmed that there was a full coordination between the NEC and the Carter Center to observe the elections. Abdallah further said Carter assured them that the Center has no power over the Sudanese elections, noting that the Centre is a partner in the electoral process.

The US-based Carter Center, which was founded by Jimmy Carter, sent 65 observers to monitor the general elections in Sudan besides the EU observation team of 130 observers.

Authorities arrest 14 people accused of spreading rumours in Darfur

Darfur police authorities have arrested 14 people accused of spreading rumours to prevent voters from heading to polling stations to cast their votes, **Al-Akhbar** reports.

PCP leader meets SRSG

PCP leader Hassan Al-Turabi and Ex-US President Carter discussed the elections process in the Sudan, **Al-Ahdath** reports. Al-Turabi told Carter that the process would not be easy and expressed concern over separation of the South.

Al-Turabi also met with SRSG Haile Menkarios who informed him that his mission would not be party to the observation of the elections. Al-Turabi hoped that elections would be conducted in a peaceful and violence-free atmosphere.

UN chief urges Sudanese to exercise their right to vote

Sudan Tribune website 10/4/10– UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon today said that peaceful and credible elections in Sudan are of paramount importance for the international community urging all the Sudanese to exercise their right to vote.

"For the international community, the holding of peaceful and credible elections is of paramount importance. The elections should contribute to the opening of political space in Sudan, ahead of the January 2011 referenda stipulated in the CPA" said Ban Ki-Moon today.

In a statement released on Saturday, the SG encouraged the Government, the NEC and political parties to ensure that the elections are conducted in a peaceful atmosphere, free of violence, harassment or intimidation and to engage in dialogue to address outstanding concerns.

Ban said the international body, in accordance with its mandate, will continue to provide technical assistance and limited logistical support to the NEC and other relevant authorities, towards a successful electoral process.

The three days polling is monitored by the international and domestic observers but the opposition accuses the dominant National Congress Party of fraud and irregularities.

Sudanese Ambassador to the UN Abdalmahmood Abdalhaleem Mohamad last Thursday

stressed that the upcoming Sudanese national elections will be "fair, transparent and successful." I can ensure that everything is set for a fair, democratic and transparent elections that everybody in Sudan will be proud about," Abdalmahmood stated at the UN Headquarters after Security Council consultations on Sudan.

Abyei receives ballot papers as observers continues to arrive the region

Sudan Tribune website 10/4/10 — Authorities from the oil-rich region of Abyei on Saturday confirmed receipt of the ballot papers and reception of two international and five national observers for the upcoming national polls scheduled to take place from Sunday to Tuesday.

"We have received ballot papers and voting materials from Warrap and polling stations are prepared to host electorates. All voting materials were flown in by United Nations Mission in Sudan helicopters today, and observers have also arrived," said Alor Kuol, a local national election representative in the area.

The polling stations have been secured as UNMIS-supported local police and JIUs military components have already been deployed...

"I will vote for PCP candidate Abdullah Deng" – Garang's widow

Rebecca Garang has urged Sudanese women to go to polls to vote for change and criticized the ruling NCP, saying under the NCP the Sudanese woman have become victims of organized crime, rape and killing, **Rai Al-Shaab** reports. Rebecca, who was speaking to **Radio Miraya**, urged women to vote for any party other than the NCP whose chairman is wanted for international justice for killing children. "How can women vote for the killer of their children," she wondered. Rebecca Garang has welcomed the PCP's call on her, adding that if she decided to vote for a party other than the SPLM she will vote for the PCP.

350 foreign journalists in Sudan to cover elections

Miraya FM 11/4/1- About 350 foreign journalists have arrived in the country to cover the elections. The journalists include representatives from international news agencies, television and radio.

Sudanese say frustrated by Arman withdrawal from presidential race

Sudan Tribune website 11/4/10 – The withdrawal of the SPLM candidate for Sudan President raised many frustrations among Sudanese in the capital particularly young men who vote for the first time.

The Sudan people's Liberation Movement (SPLM) announced the withdrawal of its candidate Yasir Arman. The party said he had voluntarily asked to quit the presidential race.

Arman was seen as the sole challenger who might put in difficulty the incumbent president in this first multiparty election since 1986.

The SPLM figure besides the support of his party saw many popular committees campaigning for him including youth, women and rights activists supporting his candidacy besides a website broadcasting video and daily statements.

His withdrawal was seen differently by his disappointed supporters. The Southern Sudanese youth living in Khartoum said the SPLM scarified them. "They sold us to the NCP," said Tong and Deng who grew up in Haj Youssef suburb.

Other Highlights

Sudan famine worsening – UN

AP 9/4/10 - Skeletal children fill a hospital ward in south-eastern Sudan and elderly villagers too frail to walk lie helplessly outside in what the UN says is the "hungriest place on earth".

Aid groups Save the Children and Medair found in a recent survey that almost 46% of children in the region are malnourished. The groups say more than 250 children in Akobo alone are severely malnourished and will die without immediate intervention.

The UN says two years of failed rains and tribal clashes have laid the foundation for a humanitarian crisis. The World Food Programme (WFP) quadrupled its assistance levels earlier this year and is now feeding 80 000 people in the town near the Ethiopian border. The UN says 4.3 million people in southern Sudan need assistance this year.