

Media coverage (Electronic) on referendum mid-day flash report-Day 1, 09
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S.Sudan, in song, dance, begins independence vote

JASON STRAZIUSO and MAGGIE FICK, Associated Press

Source: AP Online Regional - Africa Date: January 09, 2011

JUBA, Sudan -- Women broke out in song and men wrapped themselves in flags as voters in Southern Sudan began casting ballots Sunday in a weeklong independence referendum likely to create the world's newest nation about five years after the end of a brutal civil war.

The mainly Christian south is widely expected to secede from the mainly Muslim north, splitting Africa's largest country in two.

The president of Sudan, who has been indicted for alleged genocide and war crimes in Darfur, has promised to let go of the oil-rich south after his government tried for years to derail the vote now taking place under massive international scrutiny.

His unlikely acceptance of the seemingly inevitable loss comes as the two regions face an interwoven economic future: Most of Sudan's oil is in the south, while the pipelines to the sea run through the north. On Sunday, there was only jubilation though among those who had lived through years of fighting.

"This is the historic moment the people of Southern Sudan have been waiting for," said Southern Sudan President **Salva Kiir** as he cast his vote in front of a cheering crowd of hundreds lined up in front of the polling station. Sudan activist George Clooney was among those watching Kiir vote.

Kiir, wearing his trademark black cowboy hat, appeared visibly emotional as he remembered the 2 million people killed in 1983-2005 civil war. He also honored rebel leader John Garang, who died in a plane crash shortly after the peace deal was signed.

"I am sure that they didn't die in vain," he told the crowd. Women broke out in singing and chants and one man waved a sign saying: "A road toward sovereignty. A new nation to be born on the African continent!!!"

Many voters lined up in the middle of the night, and some slept at the site of Garang's grave, where Kiir voted. Among the voters was Mawien Mabut, a 36-year-old soldier who was grinning widely as he lined up to cast his ballot.

"I have seen the inside of war so we have to stop the war now. We are very happy the Arabs are going away," he said.

Standing near him was Rachel Akech, 30. The tall, pregnant woman has traditional scars on her face and her lower teeth removed, a rite of passage in the Dinka tribe.

"I couldn't even sleep I've been thinking about this day for so long," she said. "I am ready to vote."

This week's referendum is part of a 2005 peace deal that ended the two-decade civil war between the north and south. Voters can mark one of two choices _ a single hand for independence or two clasped hands for unity. The illustrations are necessary because only 15 percent of the region's 8.7 million people can read.

Southern Sudan is among the world's poorest regions, and the U.N. says a 15-year-old girl has a higher chance of dying in childbirth than finishing school.

Southerners, who mainly define themselves as African, have long resented their underdevelopment, accusing the northern Arab-dominated government of taking their oil revenues without investing in the south. The fiercest period of fighting was the two-decade span that began in the early 1980s and ended with the peace agreement.

More than 1 million people headed north to escape the violence, and about 3,800 war orphans known as the Lost Boys of Sudan resettled in the United States. Some of those orphans will join thousands of other Sudanese to vote at polling sites set up in eight U.S. cities.

Sudan, geographically the largest country on the continent, will lose a third of its land, nearly a quarter of its population and much of its oil if the south secedes. Khartoum's only consolation will be that the pipelines to get the product to market all run through its territory.

In recent weeks Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir has sought to play down fears of potential violence, saying the north will accept a vote for secession.

Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, one of several high-profile international visitors in Southern Sudan for the referendum, said Sunday that the vote had been calm and peaceful so far. The Carter Center has observers monitoring voting across the country.

"I think the last thing that the leaders in the north or south want is a resumption of violence, which would be devastating to both countries, if they are two countries," Carter said.

About 117,000 southerners who live in the north also registered to vote, but the scenes at polling stations in Sudan's capital of Khartoum were far removed from the joyous scenes in the south.

Many southerners fear retribution from northerners if they vote. A large billboard in downtown Khartoum featured a picture of al-Bashir dressed in feathered southern headgear with the words: "No to separation, together, together."

At one high school polling station in Khartoum, about a dozen staffers and observers sat but no voters appeared. Another station saw only a trickle of voters and some voted against independence.

"I voted today, and frankly, I voted for unity," said Aldod Akon Deng, 65, who is originally from the south. "I am here since 1964. My kids are all born in Khartoum. That's why I voted for unity. I've been raised here. My family grew up here. Even if there's separation, I'll stay here."

Ayeng Dut, a government employee in his 50s who plans to return south, opted not to vote.

"If I was in the south, I would have voted. But I'm here. I'm staying out of it," he said. "For southerners, today is freedom."

The north and south still need to negotiate the distribution of oil revenues, rights to the White Nile, official borders and citizenship rights. Full independence wouldn't take place before July 9, when the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, or CPA, expires and a new agreement must take its place.

Clashes could still flare along border hotspots and in the disputed border region of Abyei. That region had also been scheduled to hold a freedom referendum on Sunday but its status is disputed by the two sides. It is likely to be subject to continued negotiations between the north and south, brokered alternately by the African Union and the United States.

Clashes in the south's Unity state killed at least six on Saturday, southern officials said, and there are still a number of militias in the region. Clashes were also reported in Abyei, possibly between a northern Arab tribe and black southerners. The death toll was in dispute.

Barrie Walkley, the top U.S. official in Southern Sudan, said Sunday he doesn't think the clashes are a serious threat to the referendum process.

The U.S. has said it may remove Sudan from its list of state sponsors of terrorism if the referendum come off peacefully.

About 3.9 million people registered to vote. A simple majority must vote for separation for the referendum to pass, but 60 percent of registered voters must cast ballots for the vote to be valid. After the polls close next Saturday, local polling stations will begin tallying and posting results as more than 4,000 local and international observers watch. Final results won't be certified until February.

Turnout appeared robust early in the seven-day process in the southern capital of Juba, where voters were excited to chart a new course.

"Today we're going to determine our future. We will soon be free from Arab rule," said Ajigak Akoi, 27.

Associated Press writers Sarah El Deeb and Mohamed Osman in Khartoum, Sudan contributed to this report.

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Jubilant south Sudanese vote en masse in referendum

Source: AFP World News / English Date: January 09, 2011

JUBA, Sudan, Jan 9, 2011 (AFP) - Men grinning and waving, women singing and dancing, south Sudanese dressed in their finest queued by the thousand Sunday to vote in a landmark referendum expected to create the world's newest state.

They had begun forming up in orderly sex-segregated lines from soon after midnight, eager to be among the first to have their say on whether the impoverished south should finally break away from rule by Khartoum, ending five decades of conflict between north and south.

When the polls finally opened at 8:00 am (0500 GMT) for the start of the seven-day vote, the excitement was electric. Each time the next vote was inserted in the ballot box, women ululating in celebration.

A few voters wore their opinions on their chests with T-shirts demanding independence. Most donned the Western suits and brightly coloured floral dresses normally reserved for church in this largely Christian region but they showed no less enthusiasm for separation from the Muslim, mainly Arab north.

Southern leaders had urged voters to come out en masse on the first day. The 2005 peace deal requires a turnout of at least 60 percent for the referendum to be valid. The outcome will then be decided by simple majority.

The deputy head of the organising committee, Chan Reec, was effusive about the massive turnout in the first hours of the independence vote.

"There is singing, there is dancing, this is a day like no other in the history of the people of south Sudan," he told AFP.

Some 3.75 million people are registered to vote in the south and around 117,000 in north Sudan, the majority of them in capital Khartoum.

The independence referendum is a key plank of the 2005 north-south peace deal that ended a devastating 22-year civil war in which some two million people were killed and another four million displaced.

South Sudanese president **Salva Kiir** was among the first to cast his ballot in the regional capital Juba.

"This is the historic moment the people of south Sudan have been waiting for," Kiir said, holding up his hand to reporters to show the indelible ink that demonstrated he had voted.

US envoys Scott Gration and John Kerry as well as Hollywood star George Clooney watched as he cast his ballot at a polling station set up at the memorial to late rebel leader John Garang in the regional capital Juba.

It was Garang who signed the 2005 peace agreement that provided for Sunday's referendum, shortly before his death in a mysterious helicopter crash on his way back from Uganda.

His widow Rebecca said: "I have mixed feelings about this day for I know that my husband did not die in vain and I know that freedom has a price," she said.

Yar Mayon, who grew up in refugee camps in Ethiopia and Kenya, said: "I came here in the early morning because I wanted to show just how much I wanted to vote."

As the sun rose, another voter, Wilson Santino said: "This is a new dawn because we vote for our freedom."

After touring a polling station with ex-US president Jimmy Carter, former UN chief Kofi Annan said: "It is important that the energy and enthusiasm lead to solid results that are accepted by everybody."

Carter, who held talks with northern leaders in Khartoum before heading to Juba for the vote, said he believed the prospects for the referendum to result in new violence had greatly receded in recent days.

"Now there is a general acceptance in the north and south that if a vote for independence should be cast -- and we don't know that yet -- then it will be accepted peacefully."

Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, an army man who led the north's war effort against the south for a decade and a half before signing the 2005 peace deal, has said he will respect the outcome of the vote if it is "free and transparent."

But many ordinary people in the north were less accommodating.

"If you want to come back, you will first have to apply for a visa," scoffed Hamdi Mahmoud Hassan, when told by a southern fellow police officer that he had voted for secession, one of the few to do so in the north, where -- in stark contrast to the south-- turnout amounted to no more than a trickle.

Hassan said he was "furious" but also resigned to the prospect of the partition of Africa's largest nation.

The run-up to polling day had been overshadowed by deadly clashes in two remote oil-producing districts on the north-south border that were bitterly contested in the most recent, 1983-2005 round of conflict but a military spokesman said the situation was calm across the south on Sunday.

Results are not expected until early next month because of the immense logistical problems involved in collecting ballot boxes in a vast, war-ravaged region which has just 40 kilometres (25 miles) of tarmac road, most of it in Juba.

South Sudanese from the diaspora were also voting Sunday in Kenya, Uganda and Egypt.

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Clashes kill at least one in Sudan's contested Abyei

Source: Reuters World Service Date: January 09, 2011

KHARTOUM, Jan 9 (Reuters) - Armed Arab nomads killed at least one person in a series of clashes in Sudan's contested Abyei region, stoking tensions at the start of an independence referendum in south Sudan, officials said on Sunday.

A small group of Misseriya tribesmen, travelling on motorcycles, launched two attacks on police posts in the central oil-producing area on Friday and Saturday, said a **U.N.** source who could not confirm any deaths.

Senior Misseriya official Mohamed Omer al-Ansary said there had been a clash, leaving an unknown number dead -- but insisted his men had been attacked first by southern soldiers.

Analysts have said Abyei is one of the most likely places that could see a resurgence of violence more than five years after a peace deal ended decades of north-south civil war.

Both north and south Sudan claim Abyei, a central fertile territory on their shared border used by both the Dinka Ngok tribe, associated with the south, and Arab Misseriya nomads, associated with the north.

Its status was left undecided in a 2005 peace deal that ended the civil war and set up a referendum on whether south Sudan should secede -- a vote that started on Sunday.

Abyei was also promised its own referendum on whether it should join the north or the south on Jan. 9. But preparations for that vote were left in limbo after Dinka and Misseriya leaders failed to agree on who was eligible to vote and where Abyei's borders lay.

Northern and southern leaders have said they are now trying to negotiate a settlement but there has been no sign of compromise from either side.

Abyei administrator Deng Arop Kuol, a Dinka, told Reuters Misseriya tribesmen launched two attacks on civilians near the village of Miokol, 18 km (11 miles) north of Abyei town, killing at least one on Friday and an unknown number on Saturday.

"The civilians fell into an ambush by the Misseriya. We are still waiting for details," he said. Kuol said the Misseriya had heard false reports the Dinka were planning to hold their own referendum on Sunday and were trying to intimidate voters.

Misseriya official Mohamed Omer al-Ansary said Dinka soldiers had attacked nomads on Saturday afternoon to stop them taking their livestock to pasture and the Misseriya had fired back.

"There were six Misseriya injured and many (soldiers) killed ... We didn't start the war but we defend ourselves," he told Reuters. Abyei is guarded by a combined force of northern and southern soldiers but there has been little real integration.

A **U.N.** source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said officials had confirmed attacks on two police units in Todach and Shejei by a mobile group of around 10 nomads.

(Reporting by Andrew Heavens and Klaled Abdel Aziz; Editing by Matthew Jones)

RWviaNewsEdge

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SPLM blames Khartoum for deadly Abyei clashes

Source: AFP World News / English Date: January 09, 2011

KHARTOUM, Jan 9, 2011 (AFP) - A senior southern leader in Sudan on Sunday urged Khartoum to honour agreements on Abyei, after renewed fighting in the flashpoint oil district on the eve of an independence referendum for the south.

Deng Alor, a senior leader of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement, reported clashes in Abyei, confirming reports that calm had returned to the district on Sunday after fighting the day before in which several people had been killed and wounded.

"If the National Congress (Party of the north) want peace, cooperation and benefits with the south, the way is to cooperate with the SPLM, and to accept the implementation of the agreement on Abyei," Deng Alor said.

He added that militias organised by the NCP had carried out attacks in Abyei and in Bentiu, another key oil-producing district on the border.

Alor was speaking as voting began on Sunday in a referendum that will decide whether south Sudan opts to remain part of the north or choose independence, fulfilling a key provision of a 2005 peace agreement between the two sides.

A vote in Abyei to choose whether it wants unity with the north or south was also part of the 2005 accord and due to coincide with the independence referendum. But polling there was indefinitely postponed after neither side was able to agree on who should be eligible to participate.

Hamid al-Ansari, a leader of the Misseriya tribe, confirmed clashes Saturday between his men and rival Dinka Ngok tribesmen.

"The fighting happened yesterday when our cows tried to go to the river to drink and were fired on by the Dinka Ngok," Ansari told AFP by phone from Abyei.

"One of our people was injured and one of the Dinka Ngok was killed," he said, adding that the Dinka then returned with reinforcements and heavy fighting ensued.

"Five of our people were injured, while we got 24 of their weapons," Ansari added.

Abyei's southern-appointed chief administrator Deng Arop Kuol confirmed the region was quiet on Sunday, after fighting in which several people had died.

"The fighting was yesterday and the day before yesterday," he told AFP, without giving more details on the victims.

Much attention in the run-up to the southern referendum had focused on Abyei, given the district's potential to create a new flare-up between north and south Sudan.

Dozens were killed and more than 50,000 displaced from the oil-rich district during clashes in 2008 that threatened to derail the peace process.

A spokesman for the **United Nations** peacekeeping force in Sudan said UNMIS was investigating the latest violence.

"We are aware of this incident in Abyei, however we don't have details. A UNMIS patrol is going this morning to the location of the incident... to get more information," Kouider Zerrouk told AFP.

The nomadic Misseriya tribesman, who fought for the north during the 22-year civil war, migrate each year to the border region looking for pastures for their cattle.

They had threatened violence if they were not allowed to vote in the Abyei plebiscite, while the pro-southern Ngok Dinka population had indicated they would take unilateral action over the poll delay, raising fears of renewed clashes between the two heavily armed tribes.

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AFPANviaNewsEdge

Sudan Radio 9/1/11

- Turnout in *El-Fashir* (North Darfur state) for referendum is high. Adam Ali Adam, Head of polling centre in El Fashir, said the process is proceeding smoothly. No obstructions reported.
- In *White Nile state* voting began on time in eight polling centres. Abdul Rahman Mohamed Ahmed, Chair of the Higher Committee said all materials have been received and state police will secure the process and guard the polling centres. No incident or obstruction is reported.
- In Juba, the turnout is high and the process is proceeding smoothly.
- SSRC says the referendum results will be released on the first week of the month of February.

Sudan Radio 9 Jan 11

- Sudan Radio correspondents confirm that polling kicks off smoothly under tight security measures with varying degrees of turnout.
- In southern Kordofan and Sinnar states the process also kicks off peacefully.
- In Kassala, the process starts at all polling centres and is proceeding smoothly. No challenges reported.
- (Radio does not say anything about how the process is going on in Khartoum)

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