



PRELIMINARY STATEMENT ON SUDAN'S VOTER REGISTRATION

Nov. 30, 2009

This interim statement summarizes the observations of the Carter Center's election observation mission in Sudan during the first weeks of national voter registration, Nov. 1-26, 2009. While it is premature to make an overall assessment of many aspects of the voter registration process, the Center provides these preliminary observations now with the intent of supporting and improving the administration of Sudan's electoral process. A further, more in-depth statement will be published following the conclusion of voter registration.

National voter registration has largely been peaceful and the National Elections Commission (NEC) and state authorities are to be congratulated for this achievement. Overall, voter registration officials appear to be making dedicated and substantial efforts under often challenging conditions to implement registration activities.

The Center expresses concern, however, regarding the uneven rate of participation in certain regions of Sudan. Based on the NEC's figures so far, it appears that some areas of the country might register less than half of the estimated number of eligible voters, with the majority of states not reaching the NEC's registration target. Civic awareness of the process remains low and is contributing to the comparatively low rate of participation in registration in Eastern Sudan, North and South Kordofan, Darfur, and most states of Southern Sudan. While registration is a voluntary exercise, without civic education millions may effectively be disenfranchised by a combination of ignorance of the electoral process, mistrust of central authorities, and poor publicity of registration activities. Without specific attention to reaching those most distant from the process, the registration exercise will be undermined.

Extension and funding of registration

The NEC's decision to extend registration is a welcome step, given the low rates of registration in some areas of the country and the delayed start of registration operations in some states. To make an extension of registration viable and meaningful, the NEC and the state elections committees must quickly devise and publicize the locations and schedules of voter registration centers that will operate during the extension. This is particularly important given the limited publicity voter registration sche

Political party activity

The presence of political party agents at registration centers is welcome. However, it is evident that at many centers political parties are engaging in a variety of party activities, including the collection of voter registration receipts, and the recording of registrant identity details and registration numbers. While not technically in violation of electoral regulations, it appears that citizens could easily become confused about these activities, especially if party representatives do not fully explain their activities. In particular, the collection of registration receipts by

of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. The Center reiterates again the importance of political actors taking all necessary steps to resolve these issues.

The Carter Center Observation Mission

Following the commencement of long-term election observation activities in Sudan in February