

North and South Sudan: what lies ahead?

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Sudan, until now the largest African country, is due to become officially divided on July 9th 2011 after the referendum on the self-determination of South Sudan that took place from the 9th to the 15th of January 2011. The South Sudan Referendum Commission made the official final results of the referendum public in Khartoum on February 7th. The South Sudanese people who cast their votes in north and south Sudan, as well as in the eight voting centers overseas, decided to break away from their northern neighbors with an overwhelming result of 98.83% of the population saying “yes” to secession.

The South Sudan referendum was the final stage of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed in January 2005 between First Vice President of the Republic of Sudan Ali Osman Taha, and John Garang, Chairman of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM)/Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) at that time, who died in July 2005 in a helicopter accident.

The CPA put an end to two decades of conflict between north and south Sudan that killed some two million people and displaced over 4.5 million from the region, providing for a six year interim period during which

South Sudan was granted limited autonomy until the January referendum on self-determination.

A particularly important role was played before and during the referendum by the African Union High Level Implementation Panel (led by former South African President Thabo Mbeki), the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS), and the United Nations Secretary General’s Panel tasked with monitoring the referendum, comprised of former Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa, who heads the Panel, and two other members: Portuguese ambassador and former Minister of Foreign Affairs António Monteiro and former Chairman of the Election Commission of Nepal Bhojraj Pokharel.

As a consequence of this referendum, South Sudan will be the second country to obtain independence after the decolonization period and will become the United Nation’s 193rd member. At this time, it is important to note that after 32 years of bloody war, the often forgotten Eritrea achieved independence from Ethiopia in a UN-backed referendum that took place in 1993. Some analysts fear now that the January referendum will pave the way for some old claims of secession across the African continent and inside Sudan itself, thinking of Darfur.

Amid praise for the credible, peaceful and timely realization of the referendum by both Khartoum and Juba

* The views expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect the position of the government of Portugal.



authorities, as well as recognition of the diplomatic efforts carried out by the international community, the time has come to look to the challenges and expectations that lie ahead.

Although the most important step was concluded through the peaceful realization of the January referendum and the prompt acceptance of its results by President Omar al-Bashir, there is much to be done and to be negotiated to ensure peaceful cohabitation between north and south Sudan in the post-referendum period.

First and foremost, there is the Abyei issue. The referendum was initially planned to take place simultaneously with the referendum on self-determination of South Sudan, but was delayed. Abyei, which is considered the key point to a lasting peace between north and south Sudan, was granted a special administrative status under the 2005 CPA and is now the main concern of all the national and international stakeholders taking part in one of the most important moments for the African continent. Negotiations are still under way to set up the referendum commission and to agree on eligible voters, but fears of clashes between the nomadic Misseriya (supporting Khartoum's regime in the north and who were allegedly forced by Khartoum to settle in Abyei to control this oil-rich region) and the natives of Abyei, the Dinka Ngok communities (supporting SPLM in the South) over grazing rights in the region are spreading doubts on whether an agreement can be reached before July.

Secondly, a complex assortment of issues ranging from citizenship to the demarcations of borders, currency, international treaties, foreign debt, residency and property ownership, oil revenue sharing and other economic issues must be settled until July 2011, when the CPA interim period ends. In this case, the main problem to deal with it will be oil revenue sharing. As the north loses one third of its territory, it also faces strong economic challenges considering that the main oil fields are located in South Sudan (75% of the oil currently produced by Sudan originates from the South). Also, the southern *blend* is equally considered more important due to its chemical

composition). Reversely, South Sudan's budget is 98% dependent on oil production but Africa's newest country is landlocked and the only way to reach the Red Sea - through Port Sudan in the north - is to use the Chinese made northern pipelines.

Thirdly, the Darfur mediation team is now facing some internal and international pressure in order to present a framework agreement in the coming weeks, to be signed by the Sudanese government and Darfuri rebel groups. Meanwhile the security and humanitarian situation, as well as high food insecurity levels, continue to be a daily challenge for the hybrid United Nations African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID).

Fourthly, the normalization of political, diplomatic and economic ties with Sudan will be on the table in the next few months, as the recognition of South Sudan will begin after the July 9th. The correlation of forces between the international community and north Sudan authorities will be crucial to understanding to what extent the International Criminal Court arrest warrants on President al-Bashir can be a carrot and stick mechanism to push forward *inter alia* the Darfur peace process. Some northern Sudanese agents and the African Union have already demanded the warrants to be dropped as a sort of "reward" for President al-Bashir's acceptance of south Sudan's independence, while others lobby for the lifting of sanctions, debt relief and the removal of Sudan from the North American list of state sponsors of terrorism.

Yet there is a plethora of outstanding issues that need to be settled in the next few months, in the long term it is of paramount importance to guarantee peaceful cohabitation between north and south Sudan. Attention must also be paid to the promotion of stability in the sub-region considering the fact that Sudan is seen as a strategic interest to Egypt and that its former President Hosni Mubarak has just resigned from office. In the meantime, a strong European Union and United Nations engagement is expected after July 2011, especially to support capacity and institutional building in South Sudan.

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