

A new country is about to be born as Southern Sudanese overwhelmingly voted for secession from the Arab North.

Final Walk to Freedom

From 9 to 15 January, South Sudanese voted in polling stations throughout the vast country and even across the world. Polling stations were set up as far afield as in the United States of America and Australia for the dispersed refugees and “lost boys of Sudan” to have their say in what is being called “the final walk to freedom.”

Violence in Abyei

The mostly peaceful elections were marred by a number of violent clashes, including a deadly ambush at 5pm Monday, 10 January. Misserlya Arab tribesmen killed 18 Southern Sudanese civilians and wounded 18 as they returned from the North to vote in the Referendum in the South.

Referendum in Abyei Postponed

In the disputed oil rich Abyei region, which is meant to have a separate Referendum on whether to join the South or the North, dozens of people were killed in violent clashes. The Referendum in this region was indefinitely postponed.

Counting the Votes

It is estimated that it will take the rest of the month to finalise collating and counting the votes from all the remote regions of Southern Sudan. However those votes which have already been counted are overwhelmingly for secession. At Juba University polling station it was 2,663 votes

for secession to 69 for unity. At the tomb for veteran rebel leader, Dr. John Garang, who died in a helicopter “accident” under suspicious circumstances just weeks after being received by a crowd of over 3 million in Khartoum, 3,066 votes were counted for secession and just 25 for union with the North.

Observers Approve Referendum

The two largest foreign observer missions, the European Union and the Carter Centre Foundation have described the Referendum as “open and transparent” with over 95% voter turnout and therefore “valid.”

Logistical Challenges

Despite the tensions in the border regions, particularly in Abyei, huge crowds queued to cast their ballots. Southern Sudan is a vast and undeveloped region which has only about 40km of paved roads in an area the size of France and Belgium combined. The logistical challenges of conducting a Referendum throughout the war devastated regions of Southern Sudan were overwhelming. Many polling stations could only be reached by helicopter, or by motorbike. The first 30,000 ballots counted were 96% voting for secession and only 3% for unity. While that is only a small section of the 3.2 million votes cast, observers are convinced that almost everyone in Southern Sudan is for independence from the North.

War Wary

Since the British granted independence to Sudan, 1 January 1956, Sudan has been at war for most of the last 55 years. Just in the second phase of the war (1983 to 2005), an estimated 2 million people died and over 4 million lost their homes and were forced to flee.

A Fragile Peace

Oxfam estimated that just in the last year (2010) of peace, more than a thousand died in fighting between Arab Northerners and Black Southerners and more than 200,000 people had to flee their homes.

The Failure of the UN

Many non-governmental organisations have criticised the United Nations Peace Keeping Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) as having “so far failed to prioritize the protection of local people.”

Abyei Flash point

During the Referendum at least 50 Misserlya Arabs and 26 Southerners were killed in fighting in Abyei. Dissension between the Arab North and the Christian South on the Referendum in Abyei has led to the suspension of the separate Referendum there. The Northern government wants the Misserlya Arabs to have voting rights, while the South says that only permanent residents of Abyei, the Dinka Ngok, should vote. The Misserlya Arabs are nomads who only come to the South for grazing seasonally.

Separation or Unity

Because most Sudanese are illiterate the ballot papers are simply illustrated with a single hand marked Separation and another outline of clasped hands marked Unity.

Goodbye to Khartoum

One Southerner, Tom Drani said: “we are saying goodbye to Khartoum, the capital of old Sudan. We are coming to have our own capital here in Juba.” Atem Yak said: “I never saw the flag of Sudan as something I owed allegiance to. The national anthem never represented my will. So I will not shed tears when Sudan breaks into two. I will be happy.”

Ecstatic Rejoicing

Former UN Secretary, General Kofi Annan, said that he had never seen more smiles than at the polling stations at Southern Sudan. All have reported on the overwhelming enthusiasm and ecstatic joy witnessed in the long queues at polling stations in the South.

Many Died for Freedom

Col. William Ngang Ayuen said: "We lost a lot of people. Today is good for them." Southern Sudan President Salva Kiir voted at the tomb of rebel hero John Garang. President Salva Kiir declared: "I am sure they did not die in vain."

A New Nation

Signs in the crowd declared: "A new nation to be born on the African continent!!!" Sudan, geographically the largest country in Africa, will lose a third of its land, nearly a quarter of its population and most of its oil, if the South succeeds.

Delivered from Oppression

Julia Kiden said: "We feel that after the Referendum we will be delivered from oppression from the North."

U.S. Incentives

The United States has offered the government of Sudan many incentives to allow a peaceful

Southern vote, including removal from its list of State Sponsors of Terrorism and the lifting of economic sanctions.

Lost Boys of Sudan in America

Polling stations were set up in 8 American cities to accommodate the many refugees from Southern Sudan living in the USA. Baseball star, Luol Deng, arrived at a polling station in the North Side of Chicago, saying: "A lot of people have fought for this day, a lot of lives have been lost over this and now we have a say. All we could do in the past is run. Now we are here today to show we're not running. We're here to make a difference."

Freedom from Fear

Dolly Odwong who recalled the Russian-made Antonov bombers raining death and destruction on their communities: "The coming generation will not feel the way we felt. We don't want them running the way we were running and hiding, because when the war started everyone had to run and hide. Life was very difficult and people were saying to God: Why us? That was the question. So now we are thinking that God has heard our prayers and He is saying: Your people are going to be free!"

The China Connection

The looming partition of Sudan after last week's independence vote in the South presents peculiar challenges for Red China. Nearly 5% of China's total oil imports come from Sudan. 80% of the oil fields in Sudan lie in the South and the state-run China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) has pumped billions of dollars into Sudan, with arms deals bolstering the unpopular Khartoum regime. China has defended the Arab regime in international forums against the Southern rebels who are about to lead this new state. China has now opened a Consulate in Southern Sudan's capital Juba.

China Charm Offensive

In October China sent a delegation of senior Communist Party leaders to the South and sought to upgrade its representation to Ambassador level. The Chinese government and the CNPC oil company have mounted a charm offensive in the South and sponsored dozens of political leaders to visit China in an attempt to repair the damaged relationships and keep the oil flowing from the South to Port Sudan and onto China.

Comprehensive Peace Agreement

This Referendum is a core requirement of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that ended decades of conflict between the Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA) and the National Islamic Front (NIF), now renamed the National Congress Party (NCP).

From War to Freedom and Peace

The longest war, in the largest country in Africa, is about to be concluded after this historic Referendum, which is expected to result in an independent and free Southern Sudan by 9 July.

Faith and Action

By God's grace, the culminative effect of many years of intensive prayer, worldwide publicity, international pressure and missionary partnership with courageous persecuted Christians in Southern Sudan will bear fruit this year. By God's grace, we have stood with our beleaguered brethren through some of the worst days of vicious persecution, and we have helped them – not only to survive Jihad – but to thrive.

*Dr. Peter Hammond is the author of **Faith Under Fire in Sudan**. For 29 years Peter has been a missionary to restricted access areas. During the war in Sudan, he flew far behind enemy lines to the beleaguered Nuba Mountains with tonnes of Bibles, school books, agricultural tools and seed and other relief aid. Peter delivered some of the largest shipment of Bibles ever flown into an officially Islamic state and came under aerial and artillery bombardment while preaching*

in churches in Sothern Sudan.

The **Faith Under Fire in Sudan** book and [Three Films on Sudan](#) on one DVD are available from Frontline Fellowship P.O. Box 74 Newlands 7725 Cape Town South Africa Tel:

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