

South Sudan celebrates preliminary referendum results - 99% vote for separation

By Julius N. Uma

January 30, 2010 (JUBA) – Preliminary results announced on Sunday by the Southern Sudan Referendum Commission (SSRC) indicated that 99.57 percent of voters in the ten states of south Sudan voted for independence in the region's self determination plebiscite.



South Sudan president, Salva Kiir Mayardit makes remarks during the preliminary announcements of the referendum results. Jan 30, 2011 (ST)

The figure is higher than the 98.83 percent posted on the SSRC website, which includes the results from northern Sudan and eight countries where southern Sudanese voted from abroad, commission spokesman George Makuer told Reuters.

In the south 3,697,467 voted for independence, with this figure rising to over 3.8 million when including votes from elsewhere. A total of 44,888 voted for unity, 16,129 of which were cast in the south.

While in the north, 57.65 percent (38,003) of voters chose separation, with 42 percent (27,918) voting for unity. However, out of the 116,857 voters who registered in the north, only 69,597 of them voted.

Southern Sudanese in Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Egypt, Australia, Canada, U.S. and UK, showed overwhelming support for separation, with 98.55 percent opting for secession.

Soon after the announcement of the results, thousands of Southern Sudanese cheered and danced during Sunday's event in Juba, the southern capital, attended by religious leaders, government officials, diplomats, UN, development partners and civil society members among others.

Security personnel struggled to calm down jubilant citizens, many of whom attempted to join the area occupied by local and international journalists attending the announcement.

The referendum was part of a 2005 peace deal between the Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement (SPLM) and the National Congress Party (NCP).

While officiating at the colorful event held at John Garang mausoleum, a seemingly delighted president Kiir praised efforts of the SSRC; a body he said worked tirelessly under “difficult circumstances” to deliver the referendum and the results on schedule.

“Maburuk Lekum million marra” he said in Arabic, which means congratulations to you one million times.

Reacting to the preliminary figures announced, the South Sudan leader remarked, “the inhumane treatment southerners were subjected to by the northern regime during the long years of war has clearly manifested itself in this overwhelming vote for separation”.

An independent south, Kiir reiterated, will maintain a cordial relationship with the north as twin nations and he emphasized the importance of maintaining peaceful relations with neighbors like Uganda and Kenya.

The southern leader, also Sudan’s first vice-president said attention should now be focused on the Abyei referendum, popular consultations in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile as well as prospects of peacefully resolving the conflict in Sudan’s troubled Darfur region.

Kiir extended his gratitude to the people of southern Sudan for keeping their promise to vote for the independence of their own country.

“No one has forced anybody to vote but today we are witnessing a historic moment that has never happened since the creation of South Sudan, with the results today, I congratulate all of you sons and daughters of this region” he said.

“You have voted for your freedom and to become a true citizen of southern Sudan, if Sudan could be one country still we can remain sisters and brothers with north and continue to share common things” he said.

Kiir prayed for those who had died in the south’s struggle but said they had not died in vain.

He went on reassure the people of southern Sudan that, although they had voted for independence there are still some big challenges and problems ahead of the region, which is one of the poorest in the world.

“The 21 years of the struggle has yield fruits and nobody has come from outside country to develop our country but it is you the citizens who have develop by yourselves” he added

“The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) has been overcome, the remaining part is the formality, and you have done your part,” said Kiir congratulating the crowd.



SSRC Chairman, Mohamed Ibrahim Khalil (L), his deputy, Justice Chan Reec Madut (C) and Eastern Equatoria State Governor, Louis Lobong Lojore. Jan, 30, 2011 (ST)

Speaking at the same occasion, Mohamed Ibrahim Khalil, the SSRC chairman said the overwhelming vote for separation will create two separate states.

“As things stand now, there is need for a constitutional bond of relationships between the north and its newly emerging neighbor in the south. But above all, we need to focus on creating strong economic relations as well as respect for neighboring communities,” the SSRC boss said.

Khalil, however, said much attention will be diverted towards the historical and geographical bonds between north and south Sudan, adding that imminent challenges await South Sudan’s post-referendum era.

“How are we going to solve the problems that still lie at stake? There is need for a strong consensus between north and south, since the two were under one country for a long time”, Khalil said.

At the same occasion, Justice Chan Reec Madut, who headed the south-based referendum bureau, lauded the pivotal role played by the international community in the success of the long-awaited referendum.

Specifically, Justice Chan, also SSRC’s deputy Chairperson commended the technical and moral support given by the international community, through the UN-initiated Basket Fund. The fund, estimated at \$58 million, consisted of pooled contributions from the U.S., UK, Canada, Australia, Denmark, Norway, France, and Britain among other EU nations.

Equally vital, Justice Chan said were the tremendous contributions made by civil society organizations in civil education and creating awareness, especially among the rural population.

Erik Solheim, the Norwegian Minister for Environment and International Relations, pledged his government’s continued commitment towards assisting Southern Sudan, but urged the independent nation to focus on building good relations with its neighbors and development partners.

President Kiir also used the opportunity to call upon the media to improve their reporting, refuting allegations by some newspapers that he wanted to withdraw from the national government based in Khartoum with all his southern staff.

“You have got the responsibility to stay both in the north and south, although we separate and become an independent state, we can be “two twins country” that will represent the common interest of the citizens”.

Kiir warned people not to remove Sudanese national flags until July 9 when he said the flag will be officially lowered in the presence of the President of Republic of Sudan, Omer Hassan al-Bashir. Bashir would then ceremoniously take the flag back to Khartoum, Kiir said.

The President also cautioned the criminals who steal from people’s houses at night and ordered the Minister of Internal Affairs in the south and the Minister of SPLA Affairs to track down the criminals and immediately bring them to book.

“The south needs to be peaceful and democratic country like Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia, the north will be our neighbor and we shall continue to be in peace”, Kiir said.

Kiir gave his sincere appreciation to the President al-Bashir for accepting to negotiate the (CPA) and for making sure the referendum was carried out on time. He thanked al-Bashir who leads Sudan’s ruling National Congress Party “for the wise decisions he took for allowing the south to vote for the self determination of the country”.

“The National Congress Party has done a lot of work, they could obstruct the Referendum but we have permanent relationship with them that is why we have started negotiating the peace since 2005, although we fail to become a new state we shall still remain brothers and sisters”.

CIVIL SOCIETY REACTION



John Andrug, Chairperson of the civil society coalition for referendum was full of smiles at the event in Juba. Jan 30, 2011 (ST)

Peter Atem, the Chairperson of Greater Equatoria, Bahr el Ghazal and Upper Nile (JEBU) referendum body said, “We are so excited. Our mission is has been accomplished in reality.”

Echoing the same tone, Ayuen Kur, a co-Director for My Referendum for Freedom (MRF) told Sudan Tribune that the preliminary results, which largely favored separation were a clear indication that the choice of the majority cannot be ignored or taken for granted.

“It’s historic a moment. I have never felt this kind of atmosphere before. This is a true indication that the people of southern Sudan can mean to unite for a common cause,” John Andrug, the Chairperson of a civil society coalition for the referendum remarked.