

Six months until 'zero hour': Sudan before the referendum

In exactly six months, on 9 January 2011, the result of the referendum in Southern Sudan will be announced. Nothing less than the separation of the South or the preservation of the unity of the country will be put to the vote. Experts at BICC (Bonn International Center for Conversion) have been accompanying the peace process for years and are observing the preparations for the referendum on the ground.

Feelings about the 9th of January 2011 in Sudan may well be split as some have been longing for it to arrive whereas others fear it. "After 22 years of bloody civil war and just under six years after the peace accord between the government in Khartoum and the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA), Sudan is at a crossroads," explains BICC project leader Wolf-Christian Paes who is long-term expert and advisor to the Southern Sudanese Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission (SDDRC) on behalf of the German Federal Foreign Office and the KfW Bank.

In the case of a secession of Southern Sudan, the exact course of the border line will make for a potentially explosive situation as between 80 to 95 percent of all known oil reserves in Sudan will then be situated in the South—posing the question of how to share oil revenues. But there are other challenges ahead: how to divide up Sudanese state debt, which currency is to be used in the South? The use of water from the River Nile in the downstream region also remains a potential contentious issue. "It is a good thing that the Panel of the African Union, spearheaded by the former South African President Thabo Mbeki, was tasked to look into future-oriented topics, such as citizenship, security, finances, economy, natural resources and international agreements and legal issues," comments Peter J. Croll, Director of BICC.

Furthermore, a Southern Sudanese Referendum Task Force, whose members have not yet been determined, was established to prepare and follow up the referendum. Yet another important factor is whether voter registration will start soon, as it will have to be completed by September 2010.

Since the peace accord of 2005, a lot has happened in Southern Sudan. New ministries, 31 in number, and 18 commissions or chambers have collected first experiences in the past five years. The infrastructure of the capital city Juba has developed

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considerably. The determination in the Southern Sudanese government to meet the challenges head on is unmistakable. But there is still a huge need for support in capacity-building in government offices and administration as well as in the armed forces and the police.

The target of the government to increase human security in the cities and communities is highly ambitious as many factors characterize the aftermath of the civil war, such as:

- Weak infrastructure owed to poverty and an economy characterized by mostly subsistence farming.
- An abundance of uncontrolled small arms and light weapons (UN estimates of 2007 speak of 1.9 to 3.2 million of which more than 50 percent are in the hands of civilians).
- Violent clashes between ethnic groups, in particular because of cattle rustling for cultural and economic reasons.
- Lack of capacity and training of security forces who should protect the civilian population.

These challenges resulted in the deaths of 2,500 people in 2009 alone and in 350,000 internally displaced persons. The World Food Programme reports that there are 47 percent of undernourished people in the country. But there is also some light on the horizon: Since 2002, two million people have returned home and the amount of children going to school has quadrupled since the signing of the peace accord.

“The challenges for the international community and for Germany consist of jointly rather than independently providing support to the protection of the civilian population and the sustained reconstruction of the country,” is Marius Kahl’s, Sudan Country Advisor at BICC, assessment. The social and economic reintegration of former combatants and other security sector personnel in the South is a huge task—in quantitative terms alone—for the country’s economy, which presently offers few work opportunities anyway. “To support reintegration with adequate development policy measures, including the support of the transforming police force or small arms control, would be very conducive to the success of the programs,” Kahl adds.