



## **SuNDE and SuGDE Pre-Polling Statement January 4, 2011**

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The Sudanese Network for Democratic Elections (SuNDE) and the Sudanese Group for Democracy and Elections (SuGDE) would like to commend the Southern Sudan Referendum Commission (SSRC) and the Southern Sudan Referendum Bureau (SSRB) for working diligently so that polling for the 2011 Southern Sudan Referendum can start on January 9, in accordance with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. This is a major achievement given the short timeframe the Commission and Bureau had to accomplish the preparatory activities for the Referendum. SuNDE and SuGDE encourage the SSRC and SSRB to ensure that all Referendum Centers in all states have the necessary materials and sufficient quantities of those materials to open on January 9 and remain open throughout the 7 day polling period so that all voters have an equal opportunity to cast their ballots.

SuNDE and SuGDE are pleased to report accreditation badges for their observers have been issued quickly and efficiently by the SSRC, SSRB, and the State High Committees. This represents a significant improvement in the accreditation process since SuNDE and SuGDE experienced substantial problems securing accreditation badges for their observers during the voter registration process.<sup>1</sup> The only reported problem with polling day accreditation is in Unity State where the State High Committee did not receive enough accreditation badges for observers. The SSRB and the Unity State SHC is working with SuNDE and other observer groups to resolve this problem.

The timely release of rules and procedures remains a problem. The SSRC did not release the official voting procedures until December 19. Further, the official rules and regulations released by the SSRC contradicted the procedures described in the Polling and Counting Manual produced and distributed by the SSRC and used to train Referendum Center officials. Discrepancies between the Polling and Counting Manual and the official rules and regulations released by the SSRC on December 19 included different instructions on when Centers should open and close and whether a ballot without an official SSRC stamp

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<sup>1</sup> The SSRB did provide SuNDE with a letter two days before the start of the voter registration process which allowed SuNDE observers into Centers without official accreditation badges. The SSRC issued a verbal instruction to Referendum Center officials to allow observers to observe the beginning of the registration process but some observers in the North encountered problems being allowed into Centers during the first few days of the registration period.

on the back should be considered an invalid ballot. The SSRC did release amended rules on December 30 which corrected many of these discrepancies. However, SuNDE and SuGDE remain concerned that the release of contradictory rules and procedures could cause confusion among Referendum Center Officials and inconsistency in how polling and counting procedures are implemented at Referendum Centers.

There have been relatively few reports of referendum-related violence in the immediate pre-polling period in Southern Sudan. While this has helped to maintain a calm and peaceful environment for campaigning, there has been very little visible campaigning for unity in the South. There has been an active campaign for secession observed in the South including rallies in state capitals and utilizing posters and other printed materials.

SuNDE and SuGDE congratulate the SSRC for issuing a timeline for the announcement of results and encourage Referendum Officials to inform citizens that the results announced at the local level are not the final results and that results must be aggregated from all Centers, including the North and Out-of-Country voting locations, before the SSRC releases final results.

Because of a slow start to voter information activities in some areas including the North, SuNDE and SuGDE encourage the SSRC, SSRB, and civil society organizations to continue with voter information and education activities throughout the polling period. SuNDE and SuDGE encourage all registered voters to turn out peacefully and cast their votes and would like to remind the public to remain patient during the 7 day polling process and during the aggregation of results.

SuNDE and SuGDE will be observing the polling, counting, and tabulation process with over 3000 accredited observers in all 25 states of Sudan and in 75 out of 79 counties in Southern Sudan. SuNDE and SuGDE look forward to working with all Referendum Officials and stakeholders for the remainder of the Referendum processes.