

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF SUSAN D. PAGE, NDI REGIONAL DIRECTOR  
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**THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE HEARING  
“TOWARD A COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGY FOR SUDAN”**

**JULY 30, 2009**

Senator John Kerry, Committee Chairman, Senator Richard Lugar, Ranking Member, and honorable members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify.

**Background**

As you are all aware, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement ended Sudan’s civil war on January 9, 2005. Today, the agreement is holding but remains very fragile. New conflicts emerged, and existing ones changed. Full-scale war between the North and South is always at risk of erupting.

Interethnic violence in South Sudan has increased. In one case, armed Jikany Nuer men attacked an aid caravan going to a Lou Nuer area, cutting off food supplies for nearly 20,000 displaced people. In June, the UN noted that “the death rate in southern Sudan from violent conflict has been higher than in Darfur.” In Darfur, violence continues and two aid workers were recently kidnapped. In Eastern Sudan, a shaky peace deal holds.

On June 28, The National Elections Commission (NEC) postponed elections for a second time from February 2010 to April 2010. In response to the Government not holding elections by July 9, 2009, as called for in the CPA, the Darfuri rebel group Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) allied with some northern opposition groups and called for a new democratic, transitional government to be formed. Political tensions rose in the South when former (SPLM) Foreign Affairs Minister Lam Akol created a new political party called “the SPLM for Democratic Change.”

Despite these challenges, important progress was made. The Government of National Unity (GoNU) agreed to allow four international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) into the country to replace the NGOs that had been expelled after the International Criminal Court’s (ICC) indictment of President Omar al-Bashir on March 4, 2009.

Other important progress was made in Abyei. The National Congress Party (NCP) and SPLM publicly reiterated their agreement to be bound by The Hague’s July 22<sup>nd</sup> ruling on Abyei’s boundaries. Following last week’s ruling, the parties released a joint statement and both hailed the agreement. To date, no violence has erupted in the area, which is a major achievement. However, recently, both sides have begun to trade accusations over the status of the oil fields based on the ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration.

**Abyei**

While violence has not erupted, it is important to note that the reaction may simply be delayed because all the details of the ruling are not fully understood on the ground and the Misseriya have not yet returned to Abyei for grazing because of the rains. Furthermore, the location of the oil wells and final revenue sharing during the course of the life of the CPA are likely to be drawn into the broader North/South border demarcation process currently underway by the Ad Hoc Border Commission. Respect for the Tribunal's decision and newly drawn map is, in part, a testament to the presence in Abyei of General Gration and the senior leadership of the two parties when the ruling was released.

### **Views from the Ground**

NDI has worked in Sudan since 2004, before the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed. Our focus group research represents the most extensive information on the opinions of the Sudanese people since then.

NDI has completed ten focus group studies, including six in Southern Sudan, two in the Three Areas of Abyei, Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan, and two in Northern Sudan. As part of these studies, focus group discussions have been held in 71 locations across the country. Research consistently found that people do not feel the CPA has yielded a significant peace dividend. One southerner explained this common sentiment by noting, "Peace is just like a slogan. Most of the things in the CPA are not being implemented." Another woman from the Three Areas said, "We have seen very little [improvement in development post-CPA]... they should have done many schools and hospitals, that would have been enough for us." In the North, one man told researchers, "Before the peace agreement, the war was sucking our blood because a high percentage of the budget went to the war for weapons and [a] very little of the budget went toward serving social needs."

Many people who participated in our study in the South and Three Areas feel their lives have not significantly improved since the CPA was signed; they link this to an expectation that war will return. A man from the Three Areas explained, "We will return to conflict because now there is no development." Northerners also expressed uncertainty about the current stability, although there was a sense that development has increased somewhat. "We cannot say everything is at the right direction, despite the fact that there is a positive side like development projects, roads construction," a northern woman said.

NDI is assisting and developing the capacity of over 75 southern, nonpartisan civil society organizations to serve as domestic election observers through a network called SuNDE. The organizations have stressed the importance of working together across regions and to coordinate efforts with the North with those of the established network in the South. Amidst the numerous challenges in Sudan, such expressions exemplify a desire for collaboration regardless of the outcome of the elections to build a just and accountable government.

Focus group research in the North found some variation in opinions about democracy, but those who participated in the study strongly supported elections as the best way to choose their leaders. Similarly, Southerners are strongly committed to elections, and expressed a deep desire to hold their elected officials accountable, something they cannot do with appointed officials. Interestingly, while many people expect cheating to take place, a number of participants stated that they would “accept the bribe yet still vote for the candidate of their choice.” Misinformation is widespread, including the number of positions for which people will be voting; in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile, a number of people believe erroneously that they will also vote in a referendum. Without this option, a number of participants claimed they would “join the South, declare independence, or go back to war.”

NDI’s research on the 2011 referendum for South Sudan consistently found that southerners plan to vote for independence. Within the first year after the CPA was signed, and despite Dr. John Garang’s call for unity based on a new model for Sudan, southerners responded, “We will vote for separation and John Garang will have to get a passport to visit us.” Another noted, “We will be divided, even children know that.”

### **Toward a Comprehensive Strategy**

NDI’s research raises important points and demonstrates Sudanese citizens’ frustrations with the incomplete implementation of the CPA. Increased technical assistance and governance capacity building towards electoral implementation (including the two referenda) are crucial ways to support the GONU and GOSS in implementing the next critical phase of the CPA. Additional support for civic and voter education programs is crucial.

In order for elections and the referenda to be viewed as credible, the electoral framework must be understood and regulations put in place as soon as possible. Donors should continue to support the National Elections Commission to ensure that it remains an independent and viable body. Political parties must be able to compete and campaign freely and the media must be permitted to provide equal access to all competing interests. The media can also be an important source of information for Sudanese citizens in this process. Additionally, domestic observation of the process provides Sudanese citizens the opportunity to participate in the democratic life of their country and make informed decisions about their future.

Collectively, an independent electoral commission, adequate citizen education, responsible media coverage, political tolerance for campaigning, and the freedom for domestic, Sudanese organizations to observe the electoral process will contribute to minimizing the risk of pre- and post-election and referenda violence as well as help to ensure respect for the will of the Sudanese people as expressed through the ballot.