



1.10.2011

SUDAN Hundreds travel to London to vote in referendum on secession

Hundreds of southern Sudanese nationals travelled to London yesterday to take part in a referendum that is widely expected to result in the birth of a new African nation.

In an atmosphere of excitement that was also tinged with trepidation, southern Sudanese from the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Russia and elsewhere gathered to register their votes at the Methodist Central Hall, the only polling centre in Europe. Many had testimonies of great suffering and loss during the decades of civil war. However, upon exiting the polling booth, each person rejoiced. Some of the voters danced, while one sang: "I have voted; we are free. I have voted, praise the Lord".

Excitement was tempered by a realization that a new southern entity would immediately face the challenging development and humanitarian needs of a population swelled by over 90,000 returnees. In addition, there are many outstanding issues between north and south Sudan, including the sharing of oil revenues; the demarcation of the north-south border; citizenship for southerners who remain in the north and vice versa; and the future of potential flashpoints such as the Blue Nile area, the Nuba Mountains and oil-rich Abyei, where clashes over the weekend resulted in over 30 deaths. "I will not be celebrating yet", one young man informed CSW. "There was violence and killing even yesterday in Sudan. I will be waiting and hoping to celebrate soon". Another concurred: "This referendum is only the beginning".

In a comment to CSW, former politician and prominent Abyei elder Dr. Zacharia Bol Deng said: "I feel hopeful given the interest and response of the international community, however, this interest must be sustained. The international community must remain committed for there to be a positive outcome".

CSW National Director Stuart Windsor said: "It was a privilege for CSW to join the southern Sudanese diaspora during this landmark moment for their nation. Six years after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement ended decades of civil war, southerners are understandably overjoyed to begin what they view as the march towards a better future. We join them in their celebration, and will continue to pray for a peaceful polling process during the coming week. CSW also echoes the call for the international community to maintain its engagement in both northern and southern Sudan, to continue its assistance in the development of infrastructure in the south, and to ensure that international protocol is observed in determining the future of Abyei, Blue Nile and South Kordofan."