



# USIPEACE BRIEFING

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## **Building Blocks for Citizenship and a Peaceful Transition in Sudan**

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**BACKGROUND**

Sudan's upcoming elections in 2009 raise hopes and concerns for the country's future. According to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), signed in 2005 between the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), Sudan is scheduled to hold national and state level elections in 2009. (Elections are to take place for president of the Government of National Unity, president of the Government of Southern Sudan, members of the National Assembly and the South Sudan Legislative Assembly, and governors and state legislatures in all of Sudan's 25 states.) However, delays in each phase of electoral preparation—including the passage of the electoral law, the appointment of the nine National Election Commission members responsible for overseeing elections, and the census—have raised doubts about whether the elections will be held within the timeframe outlined in the CPA.

Sudan has never experienced a peaceful transition from one elected government to another. Past elections, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, were accompanied by violent clashes and often followed by coups. This election will also take place against a backdrop of instability caused by electoral delays, increased tensions over the Sudan census-taking, the arrest warrant for Sudanese President Omar Bashir by the International Criminal Court, the ongoing conflict in Darfur and unresolved disputes over the North/South border and resources in Abyei, the Nuba Mountains and Southern Kordofan.

**USIP ACTIVITIES**

In early January, the United States Institute of Peace, in partnership with the Khartoum-based Institute for the Development of Civil Society, held a workshop with representatives of civil society organizations, student groups, political parties, media, university staff, and security forces. The goal of the workshop was to contribute to a peaceful election process in Sudan by enhancing understanding of the triggers of electoral violence, and options for decreasing

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tensions through nonviolent approaches. The workshop utilized broad concepts of democracy, diversity, and governance, along with case studies of earlier elections including the 2005 presidential and parliamentary elections in Egypt, the 2006 elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Kenya's 2007 elections. In small groups, participants discussed the roles that various institutions—including civil society, political parties, security forces, the government and the media—played in preventing or fueling electoral violence. The program involved a civic education component, discussions of volunteerism, training in negotiation skills and communications, and simulation exercises. Participants explored the links between election processes and citizenship concepts, democratic principles and civic rights and responsibilities. They also enjoyed a live performance of a voter education play commissioned by USIP. The play reflected common concerns about the elections, such as incomplete voter rolls, womens' participation, and vote-buying. There was also a panel discussion with Professor Mohammed Ahmed Salim, a constitutional law professor and former registrar of political parties, and Brigadier Legal Officer of the Police, Dr. Yahia El Hadi. They discussed the history of elections in Sudan, concerns about the heightened tensions in Sudan, and the role of security forces during the electoral process.

**CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Some of the motives for electoral violence in Sudan, according to Dr. Salim, include disagreements among parties, competition for power, a perceived lack of fairness and trust in electoral processes and institutions, tribal and/or religious extremism, divisive campaigning, and a fundamental lack of education about democracy. Dr. Salim expressed concern that the tense political environment in Sudan has created an atmosphere that is not conducive to elections. Dr. El Hadi outlined the role of security forces in elections in establishing a secure environment, free of political bias or political intimidation and in accordance with legal procedures. He described security plans for overseeing the registration of candidates, securing polling stations and materials, protecting poll workers and

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observers, counting votes, and announcing results. Some participants in the workshop expressed concerns about the presence of police at polling stations and recommended that civil society and security forces form a council to improve communications and establish trust between the institutions.

Although many participants were anxious about the planned 2009 elections, a consensus emerged during the workshop that all citizens and institutions must work together to ensure free, fair, and peaceful elections. This includes the National Electoral Commission, civil society, political parties, the media, and regional and international actors. Participants mentioned the need for voter education regarding the electoral law. Information could be disseminated by the media and would enhance civic participation among the electorate. In addition, transparency during the entire election process is imperative. As seen in both the case studies and in Sudan's previous elections, lack of transparency leads to lack of trust in the election results, which can, in turn, increase the risk of electoral violence.

Overall, the USIP workshop was very enthusiastically received, with subsequent requests for a number of similar programs for audiences ranging from security officials to parliamentarians. The feedback and requests indicate the intense interest in elections in Sudan as well as the strong desire that they be free and fair.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

This *USIPeace Briefing* was written by Linda Bishai and Jacki Wilson, senior program officers in the Education and Training Center International, and Kelly Campbell, senior program assistant in the Center for Conflict Analysis and Prevention, all at the United States Institute of Peace. The views expressed here are not necessarily those of USIP, which does not advocate specific policies.

## **ABOUT THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING CENTER INTERNATIONAL**

The Education and Training Center International seeks to help international practitioners improve the skills required to manage conflict in all its phases, from prevention to post-conflict peacebuilding; and to promote peace by working through educational systems in fragile states and societies emerging from conflict. Mike Lekson is vice president of the center.

## **ABOUT THE CENTER FOR CONFLICT ANALYSIS AND PREVENTION**

The Center for Conflict Analysis and Prevention conducts timely, policy relevant analysis of countries and regions where the threat to peace is particularly acute. The Center also designs and manages the Institute's efforts to forestall the outbreak of violent conflict. In addition, the Center conducts research, identifies best practices, develops new tools for preventing violent conflict, and supports related training and education efforts. Abiodun Williams is vice president of the center.

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