

The Responsibility to Protect and Sudan: An Update

Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect 7 January 2011 Introduction On 9 January the people of South Sudan will begin voting in a highly anticipated referendum on independence. As described in the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect's policy brief dated 6 October 2010, "Sudan: Fulfilling the Responsibility to Protect," there has been concern that mass atrocities would be perpetrated in the period surrounding the referendum. At that point the Global Centre called on the Government of Sudan (GoS), the Government of South Sudan (GoSS), and key international actors to implement a "coordinated and comprehensive strategy to address risks" of violence and atrocities, in keeping with their commitment to the responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

The risks of violence and mass atrocities in the run-up to the referendum have long been clear. International engagement has been critical in encouraging the actors to take steps to prevent these risks from materializing. In recent weeks the GoS and the GoSS, have taken positive steps to ameliorate some of these threats. However, clearly identified perils remain. Abyei region is still a potential flash point for violence and atrocities. Southerners living in the North continue to face a risk of possible atrocities in the period after the referendum. In addition to these referendum related threats, the situation in Darfur is growing more critical with each passing day and, as was the case in 2003 and 2004, is not receiving sufficient attention.

Undoubtedly, the holding of a peaceful referendum will be an important accomplishment. Yet international actors cannot take that as a sign that they can reduce their level of engagement in the country. Swift action must be taken to resolve lingering issues, in particular the status of Abyei, and questions about citizenship rights. In the South the months following the referendum will require an investment in conflict and mass atrocity prevention. International actors must also prioritize sustained engagement on Darfur to secure a peaceful solution to the years long crisis and to prevent further loss of life.

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