

Pillay urges authorities to respect citizens' rights before, during and after Sudan referendum

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 06 January 2011 The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay called Thursday on the authorities in both northern and southern Sudan to ensure that Sunday's crucial vote on the future status of South Sudan "is not marred by any abuses of voters' rights before, during or after the referendum." (...)

Pillay commended the authorities for the peaceful conclusion of the voter registration phase of the referendum process, which she described as orderly in spite of time and resource constraints. She also welcomed the Government's pledge to respect the outcome of the referendum and to continue to contribute to the development of southern Sudan as a peaceful neighbour if it opts for separation.

Noting recent public statements by Sudanese leaders, the High Commissioner said she believes "there is cause for cautious optimism" that they are indeed keen to avoid any actions that would undermine the credibility of the vote.

"Nevertheless," she said, "the run-up to the referendum has been marked by some worrying trends, including restrictions in press freedom and a number of arbitrary arrests and detention. Both Governments must ensure that these problems do not re-emerge over the next few days and weeks."

Pillay urged the authorities to "guard vigilantly" against intimidation against the more than 1.5 million southern Sudanese living in the North, as well as against northerners living in the South.

"I have been particularly concerned by reports that state officials have made provocative statements about the future of Southern Sudanese living in the North. Officials in both the North and South should refrain from inflammatory remarks, and instead – whichever way the result goes – work for a secure, peaceful and prosperous future for all Sudanese. Citizenship, residency arrangements and respect for the rights of ethnic and religious minorities must be protected, whatever the outcome," Pillay said.

The High Commissioner stressed that the referendum should not be viewed as the end of the peace process. Both parties must continue to abide by the terms of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, even after the interim period ends in July 2011.

"From now until July 2011, the parties have to negotiate a number of critical issues that have not yet been resolved," Pillay said. "These include future arrangements on citizenship and nationality, the sharing of assets and liabilities, including oil and water, security and obligations

under international treaties.”

“In the long run,” she added, “a successful transformation of Sudan will require a strengthening of the rule of law, in accordance with international standards governing justice and equality, an end to entrenched impunity, respect for human rights and democratic governance. It will also require the sustained support of the international community.”

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