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State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2011 - Sudan

The indictment of President Omar al-Bashir in 2009 by the ICC continued to raise uproar among his political supporters, just as it garnered support from victims of his alleged crimes in Darfur. Many of these victims are members of minority groups, including women who have endured rape, sexual violence and displacement. Although a ceasefire held for much of 2010 between the rebels and the government forces in Darfur – while peace negotiations and discussions were ongoing in Doha and elsewhere – sporadic incidents of violence continued, leading to loss of lives and destruction of property.

The April 2010 general elections did not help much. These were won by the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) of Omar al-Bashir, but were boycotted by the main opposition parties and judged by international observers as falling short of international standards. One of the main international election observers – the Carter Centre – observed that:

'the continuing state of emergency, repression of civil liberties, and ongoing conflict in Darfur did not permit an environment conducive to acceptable elections. Given the limited participation of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Darfur in the census and voter registration, much of the population was left out of the process.'

Attention was also focused during the reporting period on the upcoming South Sudan referendum, one of the provisions in the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which took place in January 2011. The CPA had also envisaged a separate but concurrent referendum for the residents of Abyei – an oil-rich special administrative region – to determine if its residents would elect to join the North or South in case of secession in the January referendum. However, unresolved border issues and residency criteria of who qualifies to vote in that particular referendum led to an indefinite postponement. The decision prompted attendant rising tensions and violent clashes among the residents that are still ongoing and have claimed lives. This includes disputes between Misseriya pastoralists, who are nomadic and seasonally cross into Abyei to graze their animals, and Ngok Dinka, who are the settled inhabitants of the region. It is feared that unless a comprehensive and amicable resolution of the outstanding issues is found, these clashes could escalate into a wider civil conflict. Experts suggest that to avoid this and address the Abyei question would entail granting full grazing rights for Misseriya herders if Abyei does join the South, an open and flexible approach to citizenship by both Khartoum and Juba, that allows for citizenship for Southerners who are established residents in the North (and vice versa), resources invested in citizen-led mediation mechanisms in case of tensions between Misseriya and Ngok Dinka, and a fair and transparent process for a referendum in Abyei, with international observers.

At the time of writing this report, the South had suspended post-referendum talks with Khartoum, accusing President Bashir of plotting to overthrow the new government ahead of the region's secession. According to Pagan Amum Okiech, the Secretary-General of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement, that decision followed reports alleging that 'the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) of Sudan was recruiting, arming, financing and deploying militias in South Sudan with the aim of destabilizing the South'. Reports in March 2011 indicated that the escalation of fighting between the Sudan People's Liberation Army and rebel groups had left more than 100 dead since the referendum, with Fangal, in Jonglei and Malakal, the capital of Sudan's Upper Nile state, all particularly badly affected.

The South Sudan referendum concluded peacefully in favour of secession, and heralded the 54th independent state in Africa (expected to be declared officially in July 2011). But there is concern that the tenfold surge in population in Juba (the capital of the South) in anticipation of better prospects that occurred over the course of 2010 is already stretching available resources to the limit. The long period of civil war in Sudan and the inequitable distribution of resources by the North to the South mean that infrastructure is inadequate for rapid economic development in the South, and the new state will have to start from scratch. The sudden increase in population is also impacting on levels of gender-based violence. A 2010 report by the Humanitarian Policy Group entitled *Gender, Violence and Survival in Juba, Southern Sudan* reveals that urbanization and people's experiences during the displacement have led to changed gender roles and challenges, leading to increased domestic and sexual violence. The UN news agency IRIN also observed that 'if there is one group that faces special challenges in Southern Sudan, it is women. Principal among them is gender-based violence, which is under-reported and spreading given the long history of conflict, certain traditional practices and weak judicial systems'.

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