

# Sudan's Moment of Opportunity

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*The January 2011 Southern Sudan referendum was a historic step,  
but Sudan's most profound challenges lay ahead.*

Fewer than six months ago, many feared that Sudan stood at the brink of disaster. The January 2011 Southern Sudan referendum appeared unlikely to be held on time and had the potential to plummet Sudan back into the cycle of violence and human suffering that characterized much of its past. But no such crisis emerged. Instead, with the support of the international community, the referendum took place on-time in a peaceful and orderly manner. Millions of southern Sudanese cast their ballots without violence or intimidation. International observers judged that the vote was credible and took place in a manner broadly consistent with international standards, and most significantly, the Government of Sudan agreed to respect the results. Instead of facing the worst case scenario that many had projected, the referendum proved a marked success.

Amidst conflicts in Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Côte d'Ivoire, the leadership displayed by the parties to the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) provides an example of how cooperation has the potential to lead to peace and stability in a troubled region. The cooperation that has characterized the relationship between the ruling National Congress Party and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) in the last six months is a marked departure from decades of animosity and distrust, and it is reason for great hope. Following the referendum, Sudan faces an unprecedented opportunity for transformative change. The positive momentum generated by the cooperation exercised in the lead-up to the referendum holds the promise of helping to forge a durable peace and lasting partnership between North and South, as Southern Sudan emerges as an independent sovereign state in July. And Sudan has a historic opportunity to end its isolation and reap the benefits of an improved relationship with the international community.



*Source: The World Factbook, 2011*

The decisions made in the coming months by the Governments of Sudan and Southern Sudan will have profound implications for the people of Sudan, East Africa, and the world. Continuing the cooperation that led to a successful referendum will be essential as northern and southern leaders work to resolve outstanding issues of the Comprehensive

Peace Agreement and agree on the arrangements that will characterize their future relationship. Although the South will become independent in July 2011, the future of both parties remains delicately intertwined. Each will depend on the political stability and economic viability of the other. The South needs a strong North, and the North a strong South.

Reaching consensus on unresolved issues will not be easy. Critical agreements on citizenship, security, legal, and economic issues remain outstanding. The parties must urgently resolve the future status of the disputed Abyei Area along the North/South border, the most contentious outstanding issue with the greatest potential to provoke a return to conflict if left unresolved. A determination must be made about other disputed border areas. Popular consultations in Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan, two Northern border states that were the scene of major conflict during the civil war, must take place to determine the relative powers of these two states vis-à-vis the central government in Khartoum. The CPA parties must return to negotiations facilitated by the African Union High Level Implementation Panel with new energy and willingness to compromise. And many of these arrangements require concrete decisions by the parties in the next few months, prior to the South's independence.

Equally challenging will be the preservation of the internal security of both states. Ethnic tensions and intercommunal violence remain common in the South, and the conflict between the Sudanese government and rebel groups rages on in Darfur. Leaders in both states must create open, inclusive political dialogues and facilitate constitutional review processes to cultivate the cohesiveness required to build governments that meet the aspirations of their people. Despite popular characterizations that conflict in Sudan is fostered by poor relations between an Arab, Muslim North and an African, Christian South, both states will be multi-ethnic and multi-religious, and both must take steps to build pluralistic societies rooted in acceptance of diversity and recognition of the fundamental human dignity of each of its citizens.

As a newly independent state, Southern Sudan will rely on support from the international community to help it emerge as a stable and prosperous member of the community of nations. A semi-autonomous region for the past five years, the South has developed many of the institutions required to govern effectively, and USAID and others continue to work with them to increase their capacity. The most immediate challenge for the South will be to manage the expectations of its people. After waiting for decades for this moment, many southerners believe that independence will bring immediate improvements in their quality of life. During the January referendum, many citizens expressed their belief that independence meant schools, clinics, and increased economic opportunity. These improvements will come, but as in all developing countries, will take time. The Government of Southern Sudan must communicate clear but realistic timelines to its people. It must also ensure it is in the best possible position to provide basic services to its citizens. This will require the South to focus on investing in people, in both its political discourse and its spending priorities. Fostering inclusive, democratic institutions, permitting the emergence of robust civil society, allowing opposition groups to participate fully in the political process, and rooting out corruption are other challenges that the new

government will face in order to win the confidence of its people and the international community.

Despite intense US interest in supporting the newly independent South, improving our relationship with the North remains the most critical element of US engagement. Now is a historic moment for the United States and the international community to demonstrate their solidarity with the people of the North—and to earn their trust. Success requires that the United States and the international community work to help Northern Sudan remain strong and united from east to west, ensure that its government is responsive to the needs of its people, and demonstrate that the international community is as committed to the well-being of northerners as it is to that of southerners.

In the east, formidable political and economic challenges remain. During a recent visit to Port Sudan, a city on Sudan's eastern coast and a vital economic hub, I noted great potential for economic growth. Indeed, Port Sudan's port and oil terminal are critical to the Sudanese economy, and in the next decade Port Sudan could emerge as a major maritime hub and gateway to the rest of the world. But Port Sudan cannot reach its full potential unless it overcomes formidable political and development challenges: closed political space, lacking infrastructure, water-borne disease, and poor access to education and health care. Addressing these challenges will be critical to building the workforce and vibrant society needed to support a growing economy.

In the west, the Darfur conflict still poses a considerable challenge. The people of Darfur have suffered for too long, and the international community must be more resolute in moving the parties toward full resolution of the conflict. Security is paramount—and while conditions in some areas have improved, in other places fighting between the government and rebel groups continues to generate great hardship for local communities. Attacks on innocent civilians are unacceptable and must cease immediately. Both the government and the rebels should commit to an immediate ceasefire to save lives and stop needless suffering. The Darfur-based peace process being developed and jointly managed by the United Nations and African Union shows promise; if done well and in an environment conducive to free expression, it would help to ensure that the Darfuri people have a voice in defining their future. Actively involving the Darfuri people in the process will be critical moving forward, no matter the forum. Rebels must transform from soldiers to statesmen and disarm their movements as they work toward a negotiated settlement. And for the peace process to succeed, all parties—the government, rebel groups, and civilians—must overcome a profound lack of trust and work together to resolve the underlying causes of conflict. This will require justice and accountability to address the grievances of those whose lives were destroyed by violence committed by armed groups. As I, and others in the Obama administration, have unequivocally articulated to the Sudanese government, the United States will not fully normalize relations with Sudan until the Sudanese government has addressed the situation in Darfur.

In areas where security conditions have improved, some Darfuris have already begun returning to their traditional homelands. Emergency assistance from the international community is insufficient to enable them to thrive as they work toward a return to

normalcy. We must transition to early recovery activities, the first step toward long-term development assistance. Short-term delivery of food aid must be complemented by longer-term efforts to jumpstart agricultural development, for example. Supplying basic tools and seeds is an important first step to enable Darfuris to begin growing their own food. Access to education is needed to ensure that today's youth become tomorrow's productive members of society.

The international community has reason to be proud of its role in what has been accomplished in Sudan in recent months, but the true test of its commitments lays ahead. Developing partner capacity in the North and South and supporting the Sudanese as they work to build more vibrant, inclusive, and prosperous societies will require the sustained commitment and consistent support of international partners. As the President and Secretary Clinton have stated on numerous occasions, if northern and southern leaders live up to their commitments, there is much to be gained, and the United States remains steadfast in its dedication to supporting a peaceful and more prosperous future for all Sudanese.