

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) today urged the United States, the international community, and Sudanese parties to ensure that the January 9, 2011 referendum on self-determination for Southern Sudan is held on time and in a secure and credible manner.

“An on-time referendum for Southern Sudan is critical to preventing renewal of North-South civil war and the deaths of millions of Sudanese,” said Commission Chair Leonard Leo. “With one month remaining before the referendum start date, the United States needs to act clearly and decisively, with the international community and Sudanese parties, to complete outstanding logistical and key issues to ensure a peaceful and credible vote.”

USCIRF urges the following issues be immediately addressed:

- Sufficient referendum materials must be delivered on time to polling stations, registration staff must receive adequate training, voter education campaigns must be widely conducted and freedom of speech and movement respected nationwide, and referendum monitors must be given full access to voting centers in the South, the North, and Diaspora communities worldwide.
- Increased security mechanisms must be put in place nationwide, especially along the North-South border, for a peaceful voting and post-referendum environment.
- The National Congress Party (NCP) and Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) must work with the United Nations, and others in the international community to resolve the question of citizenship for Southerners in the North and Northerners in the South should the South vote for independence, and the safety of these vulnerable populations must be ensured before, during, and following the referendum vote.

The January 9, 2011 referendum is the final milestone of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) which ended more than 20 years of North-South civil war in Sudan.

“The United States and international community must continue to insist the referendum be held on January 9, in accordance with the CPA,” said Mr. Leo.

As preparations for the January 9 vote for self-determination for South Sudan continue, USCIRF also urges resolution to the Abyei impasse. Tensions between the NCP, SPLM, and the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya communities are running high. Failure to resolve the questions surrounding the Abyei referendum, which was also scheduled to occur January 9 to determine if the area retains “special status” in the North or joins Southern Sudan, could lead to violence, endangering the CPA and broader North-South peace.

Since its establishment by Congress in 1999, USCIRF has issued annual reports on Sudan and recommended that it be designated by the State Department a “Country of Particular Concern,” under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. USCIRF delegations visited Sudan six times since the signing of the CPA in 2005.

USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission. USCIRF Commissioners are appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives. USCIRF’s principal responsibilities are to review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and Congress.

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