

## IOM to Open Sudan Referendum Offices in Eight Countries

Peter Clotey 10 November 2010



Southern Sudanese hold pro-independence banners as they march through the streets of the southern capital Juba, 09 Oct 2010

The spokesman for Sudan's referendum commission said his organization has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to open registration centers in eight countries, including the United States.

George Benjamin said the offices will help register Sudanese in the Diaspora ahead of the scheduled 9<sup>th</sup> January referendum.

The referendum commission also said that its media campaign aimed at educating Sudanese to fully participate in the upcoming referendum is proceeding according to plan in the run-up to the voter registration exercise.

Benjamin said both the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and the governing National Congress Party (NCP) unanimously agreed to open the registration centers to accommodate Sudanese living abroad to participate in the referendum.

By virtue of this MOU, the IOM will carry out some duties on behalf of the commission in the eight countries of the Diaspora including the United States. They are going to establish three centers in the United States, one is in Washington, D.C, another one in Omaha, Nebraska, and the third one will be in

Phoenix, Arizona, said Benjamin.

There is contemplation to have a fourth center in Dallas, Texas. The purpose of these centers is for southern Sudanese to be registered there and also to vote in the same centers where they registered. The IOM will do that on behalf of the commission.

As part of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, southern Sudanese are scheduled to vote in a referendum to decide whether to be part of Sudan or secede and become an independent nation. Recent polls show a majority of southern Sudanese will choose secession.

Meanwhile, Britain, Sudan's colonial ruler until 1956, is offering to help establish border demarcation between northern and southern Sudan ahead of the referendum process. Britain's Secretary of State for International Development, Andrew Mitchell, says Britain is giving advice on the border issue at the request of officials from the north and south.

Mitchell spoke to reporters after meeting Wednesday with officials from semi-autonomous southern Sudan in its capital, Juba. Northern Sudanese officials say demarcation must be finalized before the referendum on southern independence is held.

The United States suggested Tuesday that the sides find an alternative to the Abyei referendum, also scheduled 9<sup>th</sup> January. A State Department spokesman said the United States recognizes the north and south have not agreed on details for that poll, such as who is eligible to vote.

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