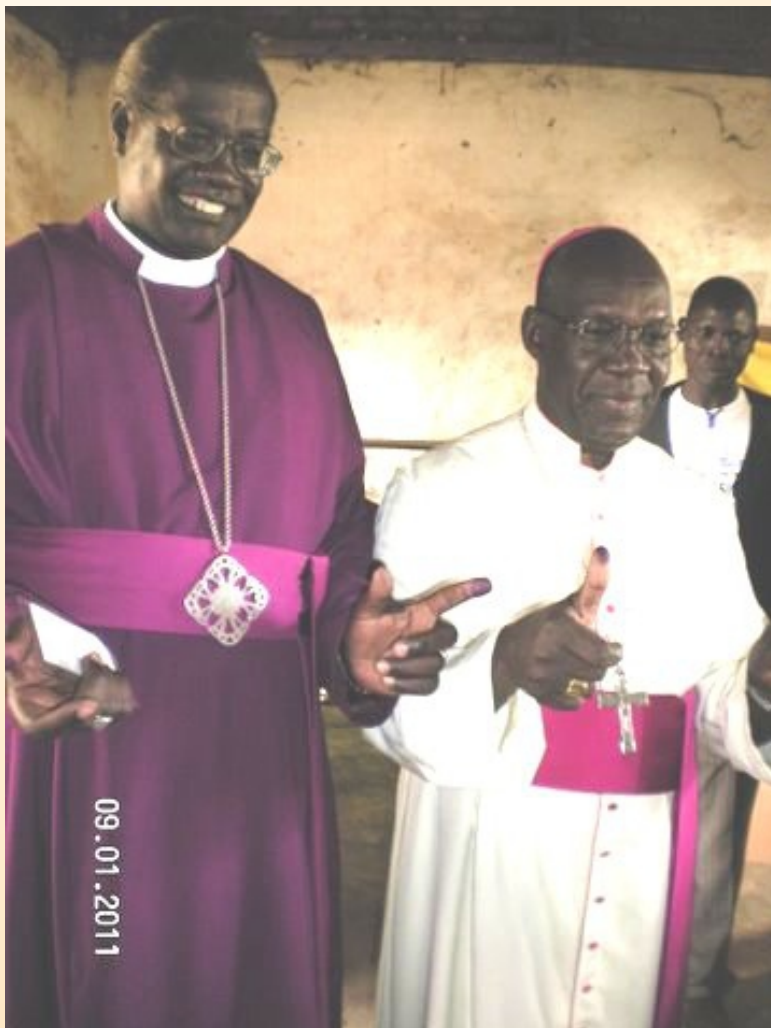




The African Christian Pulse

A Bulletin of the All Africa Conference of Churches

January - February 2011



Let my People decide!

African Christian Pulse

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THE SOUTH SUDAN REFERENDUM

By Rev Dr Sam Kobia, The Ecumenical Special Envoy to Sudan

- **9TH JANUARY 2011 - A SPECIAL TIME**

By all accounts the historic southern Sudan self-determination referendum was a resounding success. The one week long (9th-16th Jan 2011) voting period went without a hitch. Observers, both international and local, agreed that the voting was peaceful, smooth and transparent. The voters conducted themselves in an orderly and dignified manner. In fact everything went so well the journalists covering the referendum got bored by the third day. The Government of South Sudan, the African Union and the international community have accepted the results and are prepared to welcome South Sudan as a new country.

The ecumenical community made significant contribution to the referendum process. Every effort was made to ensure that the referendum was not postponed on the basis of technicalities. Our view ty



Rev. Dr. Sam Kobia (left) with church leaders.

was that the referendum could not be held hostage by anybody on account of technical shortcomings.

- **SIGNATURE FOR THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THE PEOPLE**

Being the largest country in Africa, Sudan attained its political independence in 1956 but has never since experienced peace with justice. Whether it is the south, the east or Darfur, Sudan has experienced civil wars, the last one in the south being the longest in Africa. Because of instability, poor governance and civil strife, the country's Human Development Indices are among the poorest in the world. The situation is worst in the south where

illiteracy is high, infrastructure is at best rudimentary and delivery of social services woefully inadequate.

Through their vote in the referendum, the people of South Sudan are seeing the UN Charter of 1945 coming to fulfillment in Sudan.

- **AFFIRMATION OF DIGNITY**

For the people of South Sudan engagement in the referendum process has been more than just political and social contestations: it has a deep spiritual dimension. By exercising their self-determination, the people of south Sudan have negated the dehumanization of their people. They have



Long queues of voters at John Garang's Mausoleum

rejected the dominance of one identity over other identities which saw them relegated to second class citizens in their own country. For the southern Sudanese, the referendum is a means to reaffirmation of their dignity as a people and a rejection to being classified as sub-human. Africa and the international community has been impressed by the dignified manner in which the people of south Sudan conducted themselves throughout the week long referendum. We were encouraged by their character to demonstrate their sense of civic duty and the general atmosphere of peace, which prevailed. This happened despite the fact that the referendum came

so soon after the presidential and general elections which were a challenge in themselves after many years without similar elections, and following a protracted civil war. To the people of southern Sudan we say hearty congratulations!

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH.

There are four main ways in which the role and contribution of the church and ecumenical community made a significant difference.

a. ADVOCACY

Until October 2010 there were strong forces that favoured the postponement of the referendum. The Sudanese churches and the international ecumenical community agreed with majority of the Sudanese that

the southern Sudan self-determination referendum must take place according to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) schedule, 9th January 2011. Those calling for the postponement argued that it was impossible to have in place all the technicalities by the referendum date. The technicalities in question were voter registration, border demarcation, citizenship, wealth sharing, water (read Nile river), national debt and international agreements. A strategy to counter the argument was developed. Other than the voter registration, it was argued that all other issues should be considered as outstanding and be dealt with as part of the post-referendum negotiations. They should not be considered as preconditions.

Secondly, and just as important, if not more so, the self-determination referendum was not just a mechanical exercise but, rather, a critical matter of affirming their dignity and a determination of their destiny. As such it ought not to have been subjected to a set of technicalities that could be easily manipulated by those bent on preventing the moment from taking place.

Thirdly, the consequences of postponement of the

referendum were too dire to contemplate. The south Sudanese were preparing to unilaterally declare independence on 10th January 2011 in the event the referendum did not take place on the 9th.

Fourthly, the international community would be held responsible for all of the above consequences. They were the guarantors of the CPA which had clearly given a whole six years to the Khartoum government, under the monitoring of the international community, to make all the necessary preparations for the referendum.

b. PEACE ATMOSPHERE

It is true that incidences of ethnic conflicts began to escalate in the run up to the referendum. But there was evidence to show that such conflicts were as result of incitement. The Sudanese churches, with the support of the ecumenical community, took the need to address the issue of ethnic conflicts and violence very seriously indeed. As a part of “people to people peace initiatives” the churches engaged community leaders in the affected areas. In order to address conflict and violence at all levels the Sudanese churches cooperated with the AU High Level Implementation on Sudan led



AACC Referendum Observers in Sudan

by President Thabo Mbeki, and the UNMIS (United Nations (Peace) Mission in Sudan). The church leaders were very effective in working with tribal leaders and community organizers to stop the ethnic clashes. By the time of the referendum ethnic conflicts had been considerably eliminated. The referendum therefore could take place within a peaceful atmosphere and the churches role in making it possible was not insignificant.

c. UNITY OF PURPOSE

The Sudanese churches accompanied by the ecumenical community worked tirelessly to promote unity of purpose among the political leaders. They challenged the political leaders to consider it noble, and indeed a duty, to be united in ensuring a successful

referendum. The Sudanese churches effectiveness in their efforts was greatly enhanced by their (churches) own unity in this respect. The unity of the leaders within the SCC, and even beyond, was a powerful living testimony and public witness.

When president Silva Kiri issued amnesty in October 2010, all but a handful of political rebel leaders accepted and started to work closely with the SPLM and GOSS in preparation for the referendum. It is to be acknowledged that the president had full support of the church leaders on the issue of blanket amnesty. Moreover, the one important rebel leader who rejected the amnesty was eventually persuaded to join the fold by church leaders. And so by the time of the referendum the

unity of purpose on the part of all southern Sudanese leaders and people was complete.

d. CIVIC / VOTER EDUCATION

Majority of those who participated in the referendum were voting for the first time in their life. The need for civic and voter education cannot, therefore, be over emphasized. The familiarity of the procedures was vital for the success of the referendum. The Sudan Council of Churches, with the support of the AACC mounted a comprehensive civic education programme.

Beginning January 2010, the AACC seconded a team of

election experts from churches in Africa including Uganda, Kenya, Zambia and Ghana to SCC to assist the preparations of the civic and voter education. The team conducted training for the civic and voter education trainers and supported the SCC in establishing systems for ensuring coordination and delivery of civic and voter education and election observation by SCC personnel. The team also developed training modules modelled on the legal framework of the Sudan elections.

As a result of the training, the SCC was able to deploy a total

of 232 domestic observers throughout Sudan to observe the referendum. On its part, the AACC put together an ecumenical international and out of country observers team of 110 observers in Sudan (north and South) and in Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia and Egypt.

With all those inputs the ecumenical community contributed to making the Sudan historic referendum to be the success that it was. But all the glory is to God.

COURSE FOR HEADS OF CHURCHES

The 6th Leadership course for Heads of churches in Africa took place at the AACC Desmond Tutu Ecumenical Center in Nairobi, Kenya from 31st January to 4th February 2011.

The course attracted thirty six (36) Church Leaders from nine (9) African countries representing six (6) Christian denominations. The course

imparted skills in church leadership; the role of church leaders in their call as stewards; strategic planning for churches. The course also

enhanced the church leaders' role in addressing the challenges of church sustainability. They also discussed current trends on



Group photo of the course participants

ecumenism in Africa and the role of the church in Peace Building and Conflict resolution in Africa among other topics.

To crown it all they had opportunities to visit the local churches around Nairobi to see the sustainability initiatives the churches have undertaken. This is the part

that impressed them most as they related what was discussed in class to what is happening in reality.

OBSERVATION OF ELECTIONS IN UGANDA



President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda casts his vote during the Presidential elections in Uganda.

At the invitation of Uganda Joint Christian Council (UJCC) the AACC sent an observer team to the just concluded presidential elections on the 18th of February 2011.

The AACC observers were deployed and covered 5 districts: Kampala, Wakiso, Mitiyana, Kiboga, and Mubende.

AACC collaboration with the Uganda joint Christian Council

has become more and more strong and this will facilitate the preparatory process of the 10th General Assembly planned to take place in Kampala in 2013.

NETWORKING WITH AFRICAN CIVIL SOCIETIES

On the 14th and 15th of February, the AACC brought together 46 civil society organizations and churches from 18 countries in Africa at the Desmond Tutu Ecumenical Centre in Nairobi, Kenya to develop key

messages as well as continental action plans on how to influence the 4th High Level Forum on Development Effectiveness that will be held in Busan, Korea from the 29th November – 1st December 2011.

The two day deliberations included among others:-

- Review of the process coordinated by AACC from 2008 – Accra – to 2010 – Istanbul.



A session during the CSO consultation

- The road to Busan
- Post-Busan plan of Action

Participants observed that :-

- The current real per-capita income in Africa today is lower than it was in the 1970s and that more than 50% of Africa's population is still living in abject poverty.
- Africa faces particular challenges that will

require African CSOs and Churches to enter the post-Paris Declaration discussion in a manner that allows for a healthy and honest debate about the exploitation of African resources..

. Participants resolved that :-

- Governments across Africa need to do business differently
- Time is ripe for Africa

to ask the hard questions about the role of aid in its development.

- Key broad messages towards Busan, action plans for national, regional and continental processes towards Busan be developed.

UPCOMING EVENTS

AACC Partners' Consultation/Roundtable: 7-8 March 2011, in Nairobi, Kenya.

1st Finance and Personnel Committee Meeting: 13th April 2011, in Nairobi, Kenya.

1st Executive Committee Meeting: 14-15 April 2011, in Nairobi, Kenya.

2nd Finance and Personnel Committee Meeting: 12th October 2011, in Nairobi, Kenya.

2nd Executive Committee Meeting: 13-14 October 2011, in Nairobi, Kenya.



**WE INVITE YOU ALL TO SHARE YOUR STORIES AND EXPERIENCES THROUGH
THE AFRICAN CHRISTIAN PULSE**

To join the mailing list or comment, please write to secretariat@aacc-ceta.org



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