

## **SUDEF SPECIAL UPDATE:**

**From Abraham Awolich - Juba, Sudan - February 1, 2011**



### **Southern Sudanese Could Not Wait for the Official Result to Celebrate**

Yesterday, January 31st, 2011 at John Garang Mausoleum, hundreds of Southern Sudanese, diplomats, and government officials gathered starting at 7 am in the morning. The gathering was for the announcement of the preliminary results of the Southern Sudan Referendum, which took place on January 9<sup>th</sup> through January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2011. Although the outcome of the referendum was already commonly known to be an overwhelming vote for separation, the formal acknowledgement of the result is an important piece. All the citizens in Juba flocked to the mausoleum in large numbers to formally hear confirmed what they already knew.

The announcement was divided into two announcements. The first being results from the 10 states of Southern Sudan. This announcement was done state by state by Justice Chan Reech Madut, the Deputy Chairman of the Southern Sudan Referendum Commission. As he read states in alphabetical order, whenever he mentioned the percentage of people who turned out and the percentage of people who voted for secession, he was met with applause and cheers. As soon as Justice Chan finished all the states and totaled the number of people who voted for unity to be 16,000 and those who voted for secession were over 3 million, the crowd stood and gave themselves a roaring standing ovation. Many in the crowd interrupted the process with celebrations and many people were shouting “South Sudan Oyee”. Justice Chan appealed to the crowd to calm down, as the process was not finished. The interruption went on for about 7 minutes before the crowd was asked to listen to the president first.

When people went back to their seats, they were reminded that Professor Khalil, Chairman of the Southern Sudan Referendum Commission was going to announce the results from those who voted from Northern Sudan and from out of the Country to make the process complete. Dr. Khalil went on to announce the results from each state from the north and then the results from out of country. At the end, he concluded by saying that the results of the referendum are decisively for separation and he was given a huge round of applause.

After speaking briefly, the Vice President Dr. Riek Machar introduced the President. The President was very emotional when he spoke about the sacrifices and the struggles our people had to go through to arrive at this day. He told the citizens that Southern Sudan is not independent yet, not until the CPA expires on July 9<sup>th</sup> of this year. As such, the flag of the Republic of Sudan and those things that represent the government should be respected until that time. He urged the citizens to be ready to continue the struggle not with guns, but with development.

As soon as the president was finished and I believe not many people were listening because everyone was too anxious to celebrate, the crowd ran into the middle of the square and started singing. I was caught in

the middle of the crowd as I was filming and taping the program with other journalists. I joined the crowd in celebration too.

To be honest, this day was different from any other day for me. That day I became a proud citizen of the Sudan for the first time. My heart immediately started to forgive those who denied me the chance to grow up with my family. Many people were shedding tears of joy and excitement. The children's choir started singing that all they want is liberty and peace and development for Southern Sudan. The children challenged the leaders to give them the chance to go to school - that's all they could ask for.

Yesterday was similar to how I felt on January 9<sup>th</sup> 2011 when I participated in the referendum by casting my vote in Washington DC. While we were driving to Washington DC for almost 11 hours from Burlington, Vermont to Alexandria, Virginia, I prayed to God and asked, "God, do not let me die before I vote for this vote is bigger than life itself". Of course I did not want to die after I voted either but I in that moment I did not care about anything other than being able to cast my vote. When I was given the ballot, I looked at it carefully for about 1 minute before I put my thumbprint in the box that voted for secession. After I voted my heart was pumping really fast and I thought to myself, I must have voted incorrectly - so I carefully checked my ballot once more before I put it in the ballot box. As I confirmed my vote I was reminded that I was voting for my brother who was killed during the war and my friends and the thousands who perished for a just cause. After I placed my ballot in the box, I felt like I had grown an inch taller and I was walking majestically proud. I prayed to God once again and said, "God let me live to see the Independence Day and to live in a new free country and to have children that will enjoy this freedom".

Yesterday, as I stood in the huge crowd celebrating in Juba, Sudan it hit me again. First of all, I was not even supposed to be here in Sudan to celebrate with my people. I had prayed to be in Sudan when the results were announced and somehow, an international development-consulting firm gave me a short-term contract to do work for them in Juba for one month and that is why I am here. The timing could not have been any better and I am eternally grateful to Tetra Tech ARD for this lifetime opportunity.

After dancing with the crowd for a good 30 minutes the sun was coming down hard, so I decided to go around the square where different ethnic groups were dancing. I went to Acholi dance and took some pictures and video. I went to Anyuak dance and took pictures and video. I went to Dinka Atuot dance and took pictures and video, then to dance Nuer. While I was going around to these dances I could not help but notice that the beautiful diverse cultures of South Sudan are our opportunity to build a plural, diverse and strong society that cherishes the values of each culture. This diversity could also be the weak link in building a new nation if it is not managed properly, then it might lead to ethnic rivalry over power, which would lead to chaos and failure of the state.

I have deep faith in our people that these challenges will be overcome and we are ready to set a new precedent in Africa that never before has been witnessed. Democratic values are inherent in our society and our experience with the North should be our guiding bible to building a society that does not tolerate marginalization and oppression and that gives equal value to all its citizens regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, religion and other social affiliations.

After the celebrations, I came back to my room and reflected on what had just happened and I realized that a new dawn has befallen on us. In this picture I see my responsibility becoming increasingly heavy. For the last fifty years, we have been blaming all our evils on bad policies in Khartoum and now, Khartoum will be out of the picture and I see myself standing alone and my failure will not be displaced but owned by me. The sunrise will lead me to freedom, but its light will also expose my failures that had been concealed by the shadow of evils originating from Khartoum.

Afraid of such exposure, I have no choice but to man up and proudly own my failures while I cry for help to correct my deficiencies. Programs like Sudan Development Foundation (SUDEF), with the support of our American friends will be central to the rebuilding and reconstruction efforts in Southern Sudan. Our

message to our friends and allies is that a new dawn has come and your involvement will be more important than ever before. A new nation is being born in Africa, one with defects from the many years of abuse and so we must intervene, nourish and support this new nation to allow it to grow and be healthy. We can only fail if the people of southern Sudan and our friends become ambivalent and indifferent to our cause.

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