

## **PRESS RELEASE FROM THE RIFT VALLEY INSTITUTE**

### **Sudan: Malpractice, Press Censorship and Lack of Transparency are Threats to Election**

A new report warns that next year's election in Sudan is in jeopardy unless strong measures are taken to curb malpractice, ensure press freedom and reach out to voters living beyond the central area of the country.

The election is a key feature of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that ended conflict between the Khartoum government and insurgents in Southern Sudan in 2005.

Due to be held in 2009 and now planned for early 2010, the election has been postponed for almost a year. A dispute looms between the two parties to the CPA over the results of a census conducted in preparation for the election.

*Elections in Sudan: Learning from experience* analyses the abuses that have compromised previous elections in Sudan – and that contribute to public scepticism about the electoral process.

“The stakes are very high,” the report says. “If this election lacks credibility, it is hard to see how the Comprehensive Peace Agreement can survive.”

The report is written by specialists based in Sudan, the UK and Kenya. It is published by the Rift Valley Institute ([www.riftvalley.net](http://www.riftvalley.net)).

The authors point to the example of Sudan's neighbour, Kenya, where a disputed election last year led to an explosion of ethnic violence.

Malpractice in recent Sudanese elections, the report says, includes stuffing of ballot boxes by election staff, switching of boxes after voting has taken place, vote-buying, intimidation, government interference in news media, and the deliberate exclusion of candidates deemed unsuitable by the ruling party.

In multiparty elections there have been similar abuses, often the work of candidates and their agents.

The report also notes a decline in ethics and professionalism in public service since the 1970s.

“There is a strong possibility,” the report states, that the forthcoming election will “suffer from a combination of all the weaknesses that have undermined previous elections.”

But, the authors argue, Sudanese history can also provide an example of an election that provided an authentic moment of national cohesion and participation.

The election of 1953, like the present one, was held under difficult circumstances, in an atmosphere of suspicion, with limited time and resources. Yet it confounded sceptics by its orderly nature and by the level of participation by voters.

The election paved the way for Sudanese independence three years later.

For the 2010 election the report recommends international support for voter education in all areas of the country.

Equally important, it says, are guarantees of freedom of movement for candidates and freedom from censorship for news media.

Finally, transparency in preparations for the election is essential. Carefully monitored logistical support for these preparations - and for the poll itself - should be the focus of international support.

Routine election monitoring will not be enough, the report warns. Only concerted action in all these areas by donor countries - working with the Electoral Commission and the Government of National Unity - can avoid the dire consequences that would result from a discredited election.

The seventy-page report is published by the UK and Kenya-based Rift Valley Institute, a non-profit organization that works with communities and institutions in Eastern Africa. RVI programmes include field-based social research, support for local educational institutions, in-country training courses and an online digital library, the Sudan Open Archive ([www.sudanarchive.net](http://www.sudanarchive.net)).

*Elections in Sudan: Learning from experience* was written by Sudanese and British experts on political development in Sudan: Dr Justin Willis, an historian from the University of Durham currently seconded to the British Institute in Eastern Africa; Dr Atta el-Battahani, a political scientist at the University of Khartoum; and Professor Peter Woodward, a political scientist at the University of Reading.

The report was commissioned by DFID (the UK Government Department for International Development). It will be launched in Khartoum on 4<sup>th</sup> May, Juba on 6<sup>th</sup> May, New York on 12<sup>th</sup> May and London on 13<sup>th</sup> May.

Copies of the executive summary, and the full report, can be obtained from the Institute.

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