

Briefing on the Southern Sudan Referendum

**U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Johnnie Carson
and Ambassador Princeton Lyman**

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WASHINGTON, Jan 11., 2011 — *The following is a transcript of the Jan. 11, 2011 briefing on the Southern Sudan Referendum with the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Johnnie Carson and Ambassador Princeton Lyman. The referendum, being held from Jan. 9-15, will determine whether or not Southern Sudan will separate from the rest of Sudan. According to Carson, "This referendum marks the last major phase of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed by the representatives of the governments of North and South Sudan in January of 2005."*

MS. FULTON: Good afternoon and welcome to the special press briefing on the Southern Sudan referendum. As you know, voting in Southern Sudan began on time on Sunday, January 9th. Day three of the polling has just concluded, and today we are pleased to have two of our senior diplomatic officials on hand to discuss this historic milestone in implementing the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement. Joining us today are Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Johnnie Carson and Ambassador Princeton Lyman, who is just back from Sudan, for a firsthand account. Each will make brief remarks, and then we will open it up for about 20 minutes of questions.

So without further ado, it's my pleasure to introduce Assistant Secretary of State Johnnie Carson.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CARSON: Thanks, Heide. Thank you and good afternoon. The referendum on Southern Sudan's independence is going extremely well, and we are pleased with the cooperation that we have seen from the leaders on both sides. The polling process is scheduled to last seven days and end on January 15th. Thus far, we are pleased with the high level of turnout and the cooperation of officials in both North and South Sudan.

The process has been peaceful with only a handful of reported disturbances in Abyei and north of the 1956 North-South border. There is no reported conflict in the areas of Southern Sudan other than in Abyei. Officials from the North and South should be commended for their collaboration and handling of this monumental challenging and historical task.

As we all know, this referendum is a historic moment for Sudan, for Africa, and for the international community. The people of Southern Sudan are determining whether they will remain a part of a united Sudan or become an independent sovereign state. The referendum marks the last major phase of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed by the representatives of the Governments of North and

South Sudan in January of 2005.

More critical work needs to be done in the coming months to ensure final implementation of the agreement. Issues related to Abyei, to citizenship, to boundaries, and wealth-sharing remain to be worked out. But the Sudanese Government and people of the South have defied all of their skeptics in coming this far. Just as few days remain before the polls close, and we are hopeful that the Sudanese people will continue their efforts to ensure that the process remains on course. The United States is committed to doing everything possible to ensure that the referendum and the final implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement lead to an outcome in which the Sudanese people can prosper peacefully under a single or under two separate states.

As many of you are aware, President Obama and his foreign policy team, especially Secretary of State Clinton, UN Ambassador Susan Rice, Deputy National Security Advisor Denis McDonough, and Special Envoy Scott Gration are putting enormous efforts into supporting the outcome, the successful outcome, and conclusion of the current referendum. They have been aided and assisted by Ambassador Princeton Lyman and more recently Dane -- Ambassador Dane Smith, who is working on the Darfur issue. And I might also say that while we have focused very hard on ensuring the completion of the CPA, we have not taken our eye off of the issue of Darfur.

We have also in recent months significantly expanded our diplomatic presence throughout Southern Sudan, placing a very senior officer, Ambassador Barrie Walkley, as our consul general there, and substantially increasing our staff. As these elections move forward over the next several days, we have American officials located in five of the 10 Southern states where they have had an opportunity to observe more closely the voting. We have also had officers traveling into the other states to observe the election process. A successful referendum is in the best interests of Sudan, of Africa, the United States, and the international community. And we are committed to do as much as we can to ensure that the Comprehensive Peace Agreement is fully implemented, and that whatever results will lead to a better relationship between the United States and the people of Southern Sudan as well as the people of Sudan who remain a part of the North.

I will now turn it over to my colleague, Ambassador Princeton Lyman.

AMBASSADOR LYMAN: Thank you very much. As Ambassador Carson said, we are very pleased at the ability of the Government of Sudan, the Southern government, and particularly I want to pay credit to the Southern Sudan Referendum Commission for reaching agreement, making all the arrangements that would make it possible to have this referendum begin on time, January 9th. And I know some of you are quite aware that for some time, people have questioned whether that would be possible, whether it was possible politically or whether it was possible technically. And the fact that it's come off is a credit across the board.

I'm particularly impressed with the willingness of people in Sudan to make a very

tough decision because to contemplate a split of your country and to reach a decision to go ahead with that is a courageous act. Second, I'm impressed with the international community and the role it's played to make it possible for this referendum to take place. The work of the United Nations and its mission in Sudan has been extremely important in providing technical and logistical support for the referendum as well as for security.

The American agencies working to make this possible -- very impressive. You had the USAID mission, you had IFES, you have the Carter Center, you have NDI, you have IRI all working out there, all knowing their jobs, all working as a team to support the Southern Sudan Referendum Commission to make it possible. And Chairman Khalil, the chair of the Southern Sudan Referendum Commission, who had to pull that commission together, make them work as a team, work out the arrangements, work with the international community, fend off a lot of pressures and criticisms to say, "Well, you can't really do this," and to pull it off. So a lot of people deserve credit for making this possible.

As Assistant Secretary Carson has said, this is one big step, but now, the two parties, based on the results of the referendum, have to work out all those post-referendum issues, which frankly were not addressed very far in the period before. The parties simply were either not ready or not in a position to address them before the referendum. So we have big issues out there to be resolved, and these are going to be tough negotiations. It has to do with the management of the oil sector, finalization of some of the disputed border areas, questions of citizenship, working out banking and currency arrangements, security arrangements, international legal operations, debt, et cetera. So these are all tough issues.

Now, a lot of technical work has been done. There have been technical committees called cluster groups which have been working on all these issues, getting a lot of technical input, both domestic and foreign. So a lot of work has been done on it, but the tough political decisions on these issues remains to be done.

Now, there has been in Abyei some clashes recently. Abyei is not taking part in the referendum, and nothing in these unfortunate situations is impacting on the referendum. Nevertheless, this is a worrisome situation. Abyei, as you know, was scheduled to have a referendum also to start on January 9th. It was to be a referendum in which the people of Abyei decided whether they wanted to continue to be part of the North, which they are now, or to become part of the South. And there couldn't be -- there was no agreement on voter eligibility; the referendum couldn't be held. This remains an extremely important and sensitive issue to be resolved in the future.

This is also a historically tense time within Abyei as the migration begins. And because the migration hasn't been fully worked out between the Ngok Dinka and the Misseriya, there's a lot of tension on the ground. And some of the violence that we've seen, some of these clashes is a product of that tension. We're pleased that the government, the Ngok Dinka, the SPLM are all working in meetings in Abyei today and tomorrow to resolve these issues, bring things under control, work out

the arrangements for this year's migration, et cetera, and hopefully contain the situation. But the long-term resolution of Abyei is obviously a political decision that has to be made.

Just finally on the atmosphere, I was visiting polling stations in the North -- all very well organized, no problems, no security problems, people walked in and out not feeling any pressures one way or another. Voting has been light in the North, probably as we had suspected. In the South, as you've heard, a lot of people coming to the polls very excited. That's where the bulk of the voters are, and it's gone very well. There has been no problems at all throughout the area.

We have people and lots and lots of other observers in Southern Sudan. You have observer groups from, of course, the Carter Center, from the EU, from the Arab League, from the Africa Union, from other groups, IGAD, and thousands of domestic observers. We watched in the North -- northern polling stations, as many as ten observers sitting at each station -- more observers, in some cases, than voters coming in and out. But it was a good sign. People were organized. They were eager to make this a success. So the mood in both North and South in the way the voting's going has been very positive.

So let me stop there, and I think Ambassador Carson and I are happy to take some questions.

MS. FULTON: We'll open the floor for questions.

QUESTION: Yes, my name is Said Arikat from (inaudible) daily newspaper. My question to you, sir, is this that -- all the tension that was expected or the violence that was expected that did not happen, is that in any way as a result of some sort of a deal where President of Sudan Bashir has less to worry about versus the international court, the criminal court?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CARSON: Let me start, and we can both answer these questions. No, there was no deal worked out. I think that the absence of violence in the South is a reflection of the fact that both Northern and Southern leaders have all come to the same conclusion -- that it is in their interests to see that the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the referendum in the South go smoothly.

I think that the visit a week ago Tuesday by President Bashir down to Juba was indeed an act of enormous political courage. He was met with thousands of people on the street holding up banners expressing their desire for independence. But instead of being repelled by this message, he spoke very clearly that he would recognize the outcome of the referendum vote, and that if the people of the South chose independence, the government of the North would accept it and would work with an independent Southern Sudan as a brotherly state. I think there has been over the last year a growing recognition among many people in the senior ranks of the National Congress Party that this outcome, this vote, was inevitable, essential, and would, in fact, open a new door for them as well as for the people of the South.

AMBASSADOR LYMAN: Could I just add to that quickly? There was a lot of

concern that there may be problems with the freedom of people in the North, southerners in the North, to vote and that there might be intimidation or et cetera. That also hasn't happened, and I think it's because, as Ambassador Carson said, once it was accepted that this was the process that needed to go forward, that it didn't make sense to try and disrupt it or manipulate it, et cetera. There was no incentive to make it difficult for people in the North to vote.

QUESTION: I have a quick follow-up on the issue of citizenship. Now, we know that there are millions of southerners in the North, while much less in the South. And there's going to be an area where many people -- perhaps thousands or even hundreds of thousands -- will be without any kind of citizenship, being rejected by either the South or the North. How do you assess the situation and how do you deal with it?

AMBASSADOR LYMAN: Well, both parties have said in discussions that they wouldn't leave people stateless. They understand that that's not acceptable. But the exact processes for citizenship have frankly not been agreed by the two parties. The National Congress Party has said that they do not favor granting dual citizenship to all southerners for a variety of reasons.

For southerners to have an option to choose to be citizens of the South, the South has to come into being and pass citizenship laws. The South cannot confer by law citizenship people -- on people who don't live there, even if they are diaspora people. So we need a period of time where all this gets worked out. In the meanwhile, the people in the North have said, "Look, people in the -- southerners living in the North will be protected, their property will be protected, et cetera." But on the questions you raised, how that citizenship works out so that people get choice and nobody gets left with statelessness, the details have not been worked out. It's one of the big issues that remains.

QUESTION: (inaudible) with BBC Arabic Service. The American rhetoric towards President Bashir has certainly changed in the past few weeks, most recently by the Secretary herself. And judging by what you have mentioned today, it looks like you're fairly pleased by the conduct of both sides as far as the referendum is concerned.

My question is: Based on these changes recently, can or should or how soon can Khartoum expect the implementation of the American incentives that were offered to Sudan, to Khartoum specifically, as far as the removal of the -- on the list of the state sponsoring terrorism and the -- all the other incentives, the diplomatic relations? Can -- do you have a timeline for these incentives?

AMBASSADOR LYMAN: Yes, we do, and that has been communicated to the government. I think the first step would be on the completion of the referendum and the acceptance of the results that the United States would begin the process of examining removal from the state sponsors of terrorism. That involves certain reviews and certain consultations with Congress, but that would begin after acceptance of the referendum results. So that would be the first step.

The other steps involving normalization and finalizing that designation removal would all come, we expect, around July as the other elements of the CPA are fully achieved, agreeing on the post-referendum arrangements, resolving the Abyei issue, et cetera. So one of the big processes start right after acceptance of the referendum results, but specific steps beyond that, probably timed more for July.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CARSON: Let me just -- if I would just add to underscore, one of the important aspects here is that even though we have clearly indicated a willingness to remove Sudan from the state sponsor of terrorism list if the CPA is fully implemented, Sudan must also comply with the criteria under the law for the removal of this state sponsor designation. But it does, in fact, have sufficient time to do that to align it very closely with any possible independence for the South.

QUESTION: Sorry. Could you just be more specific? What criteria are you mentioning specifically?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CARSON: The state sponsor of terrorism law says that the government cannot be engaged in or support any terrorist organizations within the last six months. It cannot be officially aiding, abetting, supporting international terrorist groups or organizations.

MS. FULTON: Okay. We have one here.

QUESTION: Ambassador Lyman, further to your comment about the cluster groups, could you say something about the composition? Are they coming from North and South? Do they have international participation? Are they actively working now? And is there a timetable for the negotiations on these issues to resume?

AMBASSADOR LYMAN: The cluster groups are made up of Northern and Southern representatives. They are people technically qualified to deal with those issues, whether they're legal issues, economic issues, et cetera. Some of the groups have made a lot more progress than others. The security group has made a lot of progress. The legal group looking at legal issues has made a lot of progress.

The economic group has not made a lot of progress except on a technical basis; that is, they know what the issues are, they've received a lot of help internationally. The Norwegians have been particularly helpful on defining the issues and possible ways of dealing with the oil sector. Others have helped a lot on defining issues of currency and what that would mean for the two countries. So they're gathering a lot of technical information, but I would say that they need more political guidance to go farther than they've gone, and that timetable has not been set up.

These all operate under the auspices of the African Union High Level Panel, chaired by President Thabo Mbeki and by two other former presidents of Africa, Pierre Buyoya of Burundi and President Abubakar of Nigeria. And the timetable that

everybody thought we'd have leading up to the referendum just didn't happen. So I know now we're going to have to see how the two parties set up a new timetable, and we don't have it yet.

QUESTION: There's already an exchange of population which is going on. Do you expect a major exchange after the referendum results come out? And will that create a law and order situation?

AMBASSADOR LYMAN: So -- there has been a steady movement of people coming out of the North going back home to the South. There are quite a few Southerners living in the North. Figures vary, so I don't want to put a number on it, but it's a large number. About 140-, 150,000 have in the last -- since I guess August moved South, some to Abyei, but -- which is not technically in the South, but to other states in the South.

What the Southern government has just done is to try and make this a little bit more orderly, because some people have sold their property and quit their jobs and thought the buses were coming and they never came, so they sat there for a week or ten days before the transport came. People got piled up in Kosti waiting for the barges to take them down the river. The bigger problem, however, is the absorptive capacity of the South to handle people coming back, and this is, as you know, a poor, poor region. Hopefully, most people will go back to where they -- the villages and places they came from, but still, the long-term absorptive capacity is questionable.

The numbers that may come over time -- it's hard to say. I've heard projections of 300,000, 500,000, but we don't know yet. People are making their own choices. The international community is working with the states in the South, particularly on short-term help, some initial supplies of food and things so people can get started. But the long-term integration, I think, is the biggest problem.

QUESTION: Just a quick follow-up. Is the U.S. joining hands with the EU, which is already planning a major help line?

AMBASSADOR LYMAN: We are under the auspices of OCHA, the UN operation. It's a coordinated effort among all the international agencies on how do we meet the integration questions in the South, and we are working very closely with them. I've also met with officials in the North. UNHCR is now beginning to work more with people getting ready to go. The UN is also working, and the government of the North has now allowed for much more access to those communities so we can get a better sense of their timetable.

MS. FULTON: Can we take about two more questions? Elise.

QUESTION: I was wondering if you could expand a little more just on that. The whole issue that -- I mean, it seems as if you're just dealing with this as just a fait accompli that it's happening and that -- I mean, I'm just wondering if you're -- everybody, not just the United States, is creating a lot of expectations in terms of

what's going to happen. I mean, for some reason, if it doesn't go through, if there is fraud involved, I mean, what's going to happen in that terms? And I'm just wondering if you're not only creating expectations but affecting the outcome in that way by already -- not just yourselves, but activists and experts are kind of in -- like, encouraging -- you're encouraging it in a way.

AMBASSADOR LYMAN: Well, we're not encouraging a particular outcome. But --

QUESTION: But by talking about all the assistance that you would give to the country if it were to secede, if the referendum were to go through, I feel as if -- I'm wondering if you're creating a reality on the ground that is creating expectations of --

AMBASSADOR LYMAN: I don't think we are creating a reality on the ground in the South about their attitudes on which way to vote. I do think that people, by and large, think that it's going to vote for succession and are doing contingency planning accordingly. That's true, but it's not because we're promoting it. All the indications are - they're going, but we have to see what the -- what comes out.

I don't consider anything in this process a *fait accompli*. There are -- first you have to get through the referendum. Then you have to have the judgment that it was, in fact, carried out properly. And there are, as I mentioned, thousands of observers who are going to give their reports as to whether they found it reflected adequately the view of the people, it was fair enough, et cetera. A very important panel in this regard is a UN panel headed by former Tanzanian president, President Mkapa, because they speak for the UN, and if they -- their judgment on this process is going to be very important.

It is a referendum. It's not an election that you have lots of complicated ballots and a lot of contested races going on like in the April election. It's a yes or no. It's a succession or non-succession vote. So it's a simpler ballot, and so far, the observers are going around and not running into a lot of problems. So yeah, we're optimistic that it's coming off well.

But, look, we still have to finish this process. We have to have it judged; we have to have acceptance not only by the Government of Sudan, but internationally. The African Union is very important in this regard. The Africa Union has never historically liked to see countries split apart in Africa. They feel it's very destabilizing. So it's an important decision for the Africa Union, and the fact that they're lending so much support to the negotiations and Thabo Mbeki's panel, et cetera, is very important. They're sending their own observers to the referendum as well.

And then we have all the subsequent issues, and I think these are going to be very tough negotiations. I think they're going to be very tough. And when you're negotiating issues that tough and you have underlying feelings on both sides of maybe historical resentment, et cetera, it's going to be a tough period over the next six months. So --

QUESTION: And you'll stay on, Ambassador, for the negotiations?

AMBASSADOR LYMAN: I will stay on if they -- if the government wants me to stay on, I will stay on. I think the U.S. is going to be heavily engaged. Let Johnnie talk to you.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CARSON: Let me -- no, I don't think it -- I think Ambassador Lyman's right about all of that. It's not a fait accompli. But I think -- just remember that this is the last phase of a peace process that was signed in Naivasha, Kenya in January of 2005. And people have been building up over the last five years to the point at which they would be allowed to participate in a referendum to determine their future.

Prior to the signing of that agreement in Kenya in 2005, North and South Sudan had been locked in a bitter civil war for the past two decades prior to that, in which some 2 million people were killed. If there is an expectation about the importance of the referendum and the moment, it is the basis of the fact that after two decades of fighting and 5.5 years of an interim arrangement, that they now have an opportunity to bring closure to one of the darkest chapters in their history, both for those in the South who have suffered and who have believed for many years, decades, that they were second-class citizens; and for those in the North who have also wanted to bring an end to the civil strife that has slowed down the development of their country and caused it its international respect as a result of some of the practices that were carried out during this bitter struggle.

This was an extraordinarily important moment for the people of Southern Sudan. This is an extraordinarily important week for them. But if there is a sense of expectation, it is built over a period of some 2.5 decades in which we could now be at the very cusp of seeing the end of one of Africa's longest wars and longest tragedies.

Ambassador Lyman is absolutely right that what lies ahead is extraordinarily difficult and will require persistent, patient, and methodical negotiation against two parties who were once bitter enemies, but now stand the chance of being two states that can live with dignity and respect side by side. But we have to get through these issues.

And we need people like Ambassador Lyman to help us and to help them work through the complications of citizenship, wealth-sharing, borders, Abyei, the distribution of wealth and national assets. These are very difficult questions. They're difficult for a country which is losing a third of its population, a quarter of its land mass, and it's difficult for a government which is only five years old in the south that comes out of one of the poorest regions in the world, difficult.

We have to work with both sides. We do, in fact, have an opportunity to help advance the cause of peace in Central Africa and in Sudan, but it will not end with this referendum on Saturday. In fact, it closes one phase and opens up a more challenging one.

MS. FULTON: Ladies and gentlemen, I'm sorry, I'm afraid we've exhausted the time we have available.

QUESTION: Can we have just a quick clarification on the status of Abyei? I mean, it was postponed -- is it postponed indefinitely or --

AMBASSADOR LYMAN: The referendum could not be arranged on time, so the issue now remains to be resolved how to go forward. And there has been no agreement between the two sides. President Mbeki has been working extremely hard on bringing the sides together on this. The two presidents, President Bashir and President Kiir of the South, have met twice to discuss it, but they haven't reached agreement. Do you proceed back to the idea of a referendum, do you come up with an alternative solution, et cetera; there's been no agreement. So this issue remains out there and it's an important one to get resolved.

MS. FULTON: I'd like to say thank you to Assistant Secretary Carson and Ambassador Lyman, and thank you for joining us today. This concludes the briefing.

Source: [U.S. Department of State](#)

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