



**DEMOCRACY
IN SUDAN**
**THE DECEMBER 2000
PRESIDENTIAL AND
PARLIAMENTARY
ELECTIONS**

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WORKING FOR PEACE IN SUDAN

DEMOCRACY IN SUDAN

The December 2000 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections

“Sudan retains a remarkably open political culture”
The Economist, January 2001¹

From 13-22 December 2000, Presidential and Parliamentary elections were held in Sudan. The head of the General Election Authority, Abdel-Moneim Zain Nahas, a former deputy chief justice of Sudan, stated that there was a 66 percent turn-out during the ten days of polling which ended on 22 December.² The General Election Authority said that a total of 8,153,372 out of Sudan’s 12 million eligible voters cast their votes.³ The previous 1996 elections, with a 72 percent voter turn-out, saw five and a half million Sudanese vote. In addition to the voting within Sudan, there were special polling centres in more than 56 foreign countries at which expatriate Sudanese were able to cast their votes.⁴

President Bashir received 86 percent of the votes cast in the presidential poll. This came to some seven and a half million votes. Former president Jaafar Nimeiri polled 9.6 percent of the vote. The three other presidential candidates, Mahmoud Jiha, Dr Malik Hussein and Samer Alhussien Osman Mansour received less than four percent of the vote between them.⁵ President al-Bashir won over ninety percent of the vote in twelve of Sudan’s 26 states. He also won the capital Khartoum with 85.8 percent of the vote.⁶ There was a boycott of the election by sections of the Sudanese political opposition.

The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) observer team stated that the elections were held “in a conducive atmosphere and in a democratic manner” despite “boycotts by some major political parties”. The observers said that the election:

allowed the Sudanese people, including those outside the country, to freely exercise their democratic rights.

Speaking after the results were announced, President Bashir stated that the victory belonged to the Sudanese people and not to himself:

It is your victory because you proved to the whole world that you are for democracy, peace and political security.⁷

President Bashir also pledged to work for national reconciliation:

I will be a president for all the people of Sudan and not for those who voted for me... We will continue the search for national reconciliation through peaceful dialogue with all the opposition forces.”⁸

Bashir stated that “Our doors will be wide open to peace.”⁹

¹ ‘Sudan: He Won!’, **The Economist**, 6 January 2001.

² ‘Sudanese President Declared Winner’, News Article by Associated Press on 29 December 2000 at 11:56 AM ET.

³ ‘Sudan’s Beshir Re-elected to Second Term Amid Opposition Protest’, News Article by Agence France Press on 29 December 2000 at 15:09:24 EST.

⁴ ‘Sudan: Polling Ends, Results to be Announced on 25 December’, News Item on Sudan TV, Omdurman in Arabic on 23 December at 13:00 GMT.

⁵ ‘Aftermath of Sudan’s Presidential Elections’, News Article by PANA on 31 December 2000 at 14:58:43 EST.

⁶ ‘Sudan: Polling Ends, Results to be Announced on 25 December’, News Item on Sudan TV, Omdurman in Arabic on 23 December at 13:00 GMT.

⁷ ‘Aftermath of Sudan’s Presidential Elections’, News Article by PANA on 31 December 2000 at 14:58:43 EST.

⁸ ‘Bashir Vows to Pursue National Reconciliation’, News Article by PANA on 31 December 2000 at 14:57:32 EST.

⁹ ‘Sudan’s Beshir Re-elected to Second Term Amid Opposition Protest’, News Article by Agence France Press on 29 December 2000

Sudan has a 360-member Parliament. Ninety seats are allocated to women, trade unions and university graduates. One hundred and twelve of the two hundred and seventy seats were uncontested, and by the end of December results were available for 264 of the 270 constituencies. Of the results declared, the ruling National Congress party won all but ten of the seats. These ten seats were won by eight independents and two Muslim Brotherhood candidates.¹⁰ A prominent Government loss was the Higher Education Minister, Professor al-Zubair Beshir Taha, who lost his seat to an independent.

Associated Press reported that the civil war prevented voting in three of Sudan's 26 states.¹¹ There was no voting in seventeen war-affected constituencies, fifteen in southern Sudan and two in the eastern Blue Nile states.¹² Under the Sudanese constitution, the President is empowered to appoint legislators for these constituencies. A number of prominent southern Sudanese politicians were duly nominated in February 2001.

The election was subject to a boycott by parts of the Sudanese opposition. Speaking before the start of the elections, President al-Bashir was critical of this partial boycott. He stated that the Sudanese government had previously postponed the elections for a year at the request of opposition parties. President al-Bashir declared "we cannot wait any longer".¹³ He said that the opposition parties had had two years during which they could have re-organised and prepared for the elections:

The Constitution has granted the right to freedom of association two years ago which was ample time for the parties to organise themselves and it is not our fault if some parties had failed to do so and we cannot delay our programmes for ever...This will not be the last election and we hope that the political parties will be ready for another election after four years.¹⁴

The newly-elected Parliament met for the first time on 12 February 2000. Ahmed Ibrahim al-Tahir, a Presidential advisor on peace issues, was elected as Speaker of Parliament. Veteran southern Sudanese politician Angelo Beda was elected deputy speaker as was Abdallah Ahmed Hardallu.

The 1996 presidential and parliamentary elections in Sudan were held on a no-party basis. The 1996 presidential election was itself the first time that the Sudanese people were able to directly elect their head-of-state. In November 1998, the Sudanese Parliament approved a return to multi-party politics in Sudan, political parties having previously been banned since 1989.¹⁵ This return to multi-party politics followed the ratification of a new Constitution earlier in 1998 which guaranteed freedom of association, expression and religion. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression stated in March 2000 that "The Sudan has made great progress recently and the Special Rapporteur notes with appreciation the attempts of the Government to be more open with regard to freedom of opinion and expression. These new developments are reflected in greater political expression and more political debate in the newspapers".

The Sudanese Presidential and Parliamentary elections were observed by teams from the Organization of the African Unity (OAU), League of Arab States and Arab Parliamentary Union.

¹⁰ 'Sudan's Ruling Party Sweeps Legislative Selections Under Opposition Boycott', News Article by Associated Press on 30 December 2000 at 13:11:33.

¹¹ 'Sudanese President Declared Winner', News Article by Associated Press on 29 December 2000 at 11:56 AM ET.

¹² 'Sudan's Ruling Party Sweeps Legislative Selections Under Opposition Boycott', News Article by Associated Press on 30 December 2000 at 13:11:33.

¹³ 'Opposition Could Have Participated in Elections: Beshir', News Article by Agence France Presse on 4 December 2000 at 14:35:31.

¹⁴ 'Opposition Could Have Participated in Elections: Beshir', News Article by Agence France Presse on 4 December 2000 at 14:35:31.

¹⁵ 'Sudan Parliament Ratifies Multi-Party Bill', News Article by Reuters on 24 November 1998 at 09:47:13.

Hereunder is the text of the statement issued by the OAU Observer Team as been published by the OAU Secretariat General-Addis Ababa in its Press Release No.123/2000; 29 December 2000.

Text begins:

At the invitation of the General Elections Authority of the Republic of the Sudan and as part of the efforts of the Organization of African Unity to support the democratization process in Africa, the OAU Secretary General dispatched a Nine-member Team to observe the elections from 5th to 23rd December 2000 in the Sudan. The OAU Team, led by H.E. Ambassador Pascal Gayama, observed the elections in various parts of the country. Having witnessed various aspects of the electoral process, including administrative arrangements, campaigns and polling activities, and having held discussions with all five presidential candidates as well as other parties, including those which boycotted the elections, the Team wishes to commend the General Elections Authority for the arrangements that allowed the Sudanese people, including those outside the country to freely exercise their democratic rights. The team took note of the mechanism put in place to deal with the complaints on voting irregularities. Equally, the OAU team wishes to congratulate the Sudanese people in general for their maturity, patience and the disciplined manner, which they manifested through out the process. The OAU team, during its meetings with the candidates and political parties, took note of their concerns, such as the handling of the voters' rolls, the airtime accorded by the government television and radio stations, the high proposing and insurance fees charged to the sponsors and their candidates, inadequate time to prepare for the elections, lack of sufficient resources for the parties to participate effectively etc. The team will transmit all the reported and observed problems together with some suggestions on how best to go about them, to the General Elections Authority in a more detailed report of the team. It is acknowledge that in a country of about 30 million people of the size of the Sudan, it was inevitable that there would be some logistical challenges. It is the team's hope that many of these challenges will be overcome in future elections. While noting that some major political parties boycotted the elections, it was encouraging however, that the leaders from all sides expressed their readiness and commitment to embark, after the elections, on a dialogue. This will hopefully bring about national reconciliation. Given the above-mentioned observations and other prevailing circumstances it is the view of the OAU observer team that the overall exercise was an important step towards democratization and that it was conducted in a conducive atmosphere and in a satisfactory manner. The OAU team takes this opportunity to express its appreciation to some African Diplomatic Missions, the Arab League, the Chad delegation and the Arab Parliamentary Union for the friendly cooperation with the OAU Observers. More important, the OAU team would like to express its sincere thanks and gratitude to the General Elections Authority and the people of the Republic of the Sudan for the hospitality and close cooperation extended to it. The OAU would like to reaffirm its commitment to the promotion of the democratization process being undertaken by the people of the Sudan and will always be ready to render any possible assistance that may be required. Finally, the Organization of African Unity wishes the government and the people of the Republic of the Sudan lasting peace and continued prosperity.

Ends text.