

24 September 2010

## Open letter to the participants of the UN high level meeting on Sudan

With just over 100 days before the referenda on the future of southern Sudan and the Abyei region, we welcome the convening of the high level meeting on Sudan as an opportunity to bring urgent attention to the unresolved issues. As five NGOs operating and supporting national NGOs in Sudan, we call upon you to ensure that protecting civilians from violence and the delivery of emergency relief and essential social services (such as health and education) go hand in hand with intensified diplomatic engagement ahead of the referenda.

The high stakes and uncertainty surrounding the referenda present an immense risk to stability and the safety of civilians, particularly women and children. Unless swift, tangible progress is made in resolving outstanding disagreements ahead of the referenda, new violence could erupt and the achievements of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which ended one of Africa's longest and deadliest civil wars, will be jeopardised. The credibility of all actors involved, including the Parties and the Guarantors, is at stake.

However, this is not the only threat to civilians. So far in 2010, over 188,000 people have been forced from their homes due to violence in southern Sudan. Darfur, western Sudan, also continues to experience high levels of insecurity and displacement.

The success or failure of the UN peacekeeping mission in Sudan (UNMIS) will be judged in the coming months, both in terms of its role in supporting the CPA and in protecting civilians from violence. Despite strong protection language in its renewed mandate, the mission, notwithstanding the scale of the challenge, is yet to robustly increase efforts to protect the safety of civilians.

Moreover, the international community must not lose sight of the daily suffering and needs of the Sudanese population. In southern Sudan, half the population does not have safe drinking water and over 3 million people are dangerously food insecure. It is feared that this, combined with any further instability around the referenda, could create a severe humanitarian crisis.

At the same time, we must not forget that the crisis in Darfur remains one of the worst humanitarian emergencies in the world, with over 2.5 million people displaced from their homes and nearly 5 million requiring humanitarian assistance. Renewed violence and insecurity in 2010, including attacks on aid workers and obstacles to accessing vulnerable populations, have made it increasingly difficult to deliver timely emergency relief.

Lastly, whatever happens in the coming months, it will take decades to overcome poverty and suffering in Sudan, and for many the Millennium Development Goals remain a distant dream.

### Recommendations

**1. Intensify international engagement ahead of the referenda:** The international community must urgently provide strong support to the Parties to the CPA (the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement) to work together in order to resolve key issues in the lead-up to the 2011 referenda and the post-referenda period.

**2. Protecting civilians and mitigating conflict:** UNMIS and UNAMID must robustly and proactively prioritise the implementation of their mandates to protect civilians from violence. The missions must be adequately supported by the UN Security Council and the African Union in order to achieve their challenging tasks.

The Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS) requires significant support to strengthen the ability and authority of its police force, not just to oversee the referendum but to provide security to its citizens and strengthen the rule of law for the long-term. The GoSS should also work with civil society and communities to address the root causes of conflict across southern Sudan.

**3. Strengthen emergency preparedness and response:** The international community, the Government of Sudan, and the Government of Southern Sudan must ensure that aid agencies are able to deliver urgently needed humanitarian relief to vulnerable populations across all of Sudan, based on where the need is greatest. Donors must make sure that humanitarian needs are covered through effective contingency planning, and that the financial and political support needed to turn plans into action is received.

**4. Reduce poverty and accelerate social service delivery:** Sudan will require long-term, generous and coordinated relief, recovery and development assistance to reduce poverty and accelerate delivery of social services. Drawing on past lessons, the post-referenda aid system must be tailored to local realities and be accessible to NGOs and local civil society. Donors must not neglect the developmental challenges in northern Sudan, in particular in eastern Sudan, which also suffers from chronic poverty.

**5. A Sudan-wide approach:** Much-needed attention on the CPA should not come at the expense of Darfur, where the humanitarian situation remains grave.

Whatever the outcome of the referenda, the international community must not lose sight of the range of humanitarian and development challenges across Sudan, including in southern Sudan, Darfur, the transitional areas and eastern Sudan. We call on the international community to pursue a principled, proactive and long-term approach for all of Sudan.

Yours respectfully,

**Christian Aid**  
**International Rescue Committee**  
**Oxfam**  
**Tearfund**  
**World Vision**

