

Sudan Democracy First Group

Observer Missions Must stop Lending their Credibility to Sudan Elections

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International elections observer missions should immediately pull out of Sudan. These groups appear to no longer be able to fulfill their mandate and serve only to legitimize a deeply-flawed elections process.

International observer missions have so far been subject to severe government intimidation. The Sudanese government harshly criticized the Carter Center after publication of its report on March 17th which detailed significant violations in the elections process throughout all stages including fraud and repression of speech and other freedoms. The report also described the uneven playing field for political parties and unequal access to media suggesting technical advises to enable National Election Commission (NEC) to handle the electoral process. Since then the Sudanese government has on multiple occasions threatened all international observer groups more broadly. On March 22nd President Omar al Bashir publicly threatened to cut off the noses and fingers of internationals who “intervene in internal affairs” and endorsed any delay of elections. He repeated this threat on April 5 in Jazeera State. Threats to international actors who intervene to *oppose* any postponement of the poll—such as for example, the United States Special Envoy— are conspicuously absent.

Rather than publicly disclose the extent of the program of harassment and intimidation which has accompanied these public threats of violence by the President and his aides, *international observer missions have been cowed into silence or inside doors in bilateral discussion with the same NCP.* They have not spoken out about the harassment and intimidation they are suffering—including the arrest and interrogation of their local staff and unlawful search of private homes—, expelling out one of their international staff and other obstacles to their operations such as denial of visas and bureaucratic obstacles to deployment. Some reports even suggest that the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC), which spearheaded the expulsion of humanitarian organizations last year is ready to step in this campaign of harassment against both national and international NGOs involved in elections observation activities.

The threats and harassment suffered by international observer missions have undermined their ability to honestly report on the continued violations—in effect to carry out their basic missions. The Carter Center and the European Mission, for example, have already made it clear in different conversations that they will not release any statements until *after* the elections are over. Ironically, a senior NCP officer told journalists that they will not hear from election observers before the results of the elections. Furthermore, Khartoum press quoted the Deputy NEC Chairperson that they agreed with Carter Center not to issue such reports that harm the electoral process. Absent capacity to acknowledge the current environment of threats and intimidation being faced by those who voice concerns about election process violations, the continued presence of international elections observers in Sudan does not serve the function intended, that of observing and analyzing the electoral process and contributing to improvements through constructive engagement with the authorities. This inability also renders naught the public guardianship role which is envisaged for international and domestic observers in how their mandate is described in the National Electoral Act. Further, the President’s violent threats to those international observers who express reservations about the process *de facto* violate the memoranda of

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understanding and other bilateral accords which are the basis upon which international missions have been permitted to access the territory and, in return, to exercise the mandate given to them by their relevant inter-governmental or non-governmental controlling organs.

This silent acquiescence by international observer missions in the face of increasing repression also undermines the attempts of local domestic observers to monitor the process. Today, for example, a number of local organisations, all of which have been internationally recognized as independent civil society experts, were summarily informed they would not be permitted to participate as election monitors by the NEC. The NEC refused to provide either a copy of this determination in writing or reasons for the decision. The silence is contributing to the climate of fear and insecurity which is unfolding around the elections, adding to both the apprehension and probability of violence and greater repression.

To date, there are a large number of observer missions in Sudan: The Carter Center, European Union, African Union, IGAD countries, Arab League, Great Lakes group and individual country missions such as Egypt and Japan. Except for The Carter Center, all of these missions arrived only recently, and were not on the ground to witness the majority of the rigging and fraud and other violations that have been documented by The Carter Center and other international groups including the International Crisis Group, Human Rights Watch and Save Darfur. The utility of these short term observers is highly dubious in the context of an election process which has been determined by many of the main opposition parties to be so fundamentally flawed that they have withdrawn their candidates or are urgently seeking a postponement of the vote. Indeed, many Sudanese are questioning the role of some regional groups as being solely supporting the perpetuation of status quo.

In this environment, the presence of international observers appears to serve only one interest -- the political interest of the ruling National Congress Party. By remaining as a part of the process, these missions lend the appearance of legitimacy to what has been proven to be a deeply flawed elections process and the presumed re-election of a man who is internationally wanted for war crimes in a vote that is neither free nor fair. As tense political dynamics unfold and possibly turn violent in coming weeks, loud and forceful comment is needed. Unless there is a change in the will and capacity of international observer missions the record shows that their fearful silence will in effect render them complicit in what unfolds. If they cannot challenge threats to the integrity and safety of their own missions and personnel what kind of defense of the rights to democratic participation of the people of Sudan can be expected? International election observer missions must **stop lending their credibility to this process.**

Sudan Democracy First Group is :

A coalition of democrats and for Sudan activists, trade unionists and academics men and women representing Sudan different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The main agenda of the initiative is to voice the concerns of the voiceless Sudanese people across the country in the current critical moment the country is going through. The initiative is connected to other initiatives formed by Sudanese people in different centers across Sudan.

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