

SUDAN

Sudan elections move forward amid controversy

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Mohammed Ahmed, head of the NEC Corporation's technical committee, told the Agence France-Presse.

This election, a long-time coming for the Sudanese, is expected to further solidify the peace between northern and southern Sudan.

A divide has existed for over 60 years. In 1946, the British and Egyptian government officially labeled north and south as separate regions. It wasn't until Sudan was granted its independence in 1953 that the two were once again united.

Even after unification, there was tension between the larger northern region and the southern region. Christians and Animists mainly occupy southern Sudan, while northern Sudan is inhabited primarily by Muslims. Two cultures occupying the same country contributed to the strain between the two regions.

Also, those in the smaller southern region feared a lack of representation in the affairs of the Sudanese government without an official federal government to establish

equality between the north and the south.

A civil war broke out between the north and the south that lasted for almost 20 years and spilled into the Second Sudanese Civil War. Peace came in the form of a treaty, which was signed in 2005.

The 2010 Sudanese election brings a new era that will hopefully begin to reconcile north and south. Not only that, the election is the first step toward government reform that seems to be geared toward the possible removal of Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir from office. Al-Bashir, the president of Sudan since 1989, was accused of war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity in 2008. Al-Bashir has caused conflict for Sudan after he was almost arrested last year.

Many demands for citizens' rights and an end to genocide in Darfur have also arisen from this election.

"For too long, a military dictatorship has monopolized power and wealth in Sudan, committing genocide in Darfur and violently oppressing the rest of the country," said the Savedarfur.org Web site in reference to the 2010 Sudanese elections. "Given the current conditions in Sudan, the international

community needs to ensure that the elections don't legitimize this genocidal regime."

Former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Herman Cohen told VOA News that the primary concern for the election was a voter boycott for fear of rigged elections.

"Do not boycott because rigging. (The) rigging, will be seen," said Cohen. "If you boycott, they do not have to rig, so it is important to participate and make sure that the rigging is documented and therefore making the winner even much less legitimate."

In 2009, the Sudan Tribune reported that some citizens were already planning on boycotting the 2010 election unless changes were made before the election occurred.

Al-Bashir met with leaders from two opposing parties in an attempt to quell the boycott.

"The meeting demanded the government to change laws obstructing free political campaigns and freedom of expression in the country and resolved that the President Omar al-Bashir should suspend immediately articles related to the restriction of public

freedoms while the parliament should change the concerned laws by mid-October," reported the Tribune on Aug. 16, 2009.

VOA News acknowledged there might have been some problems in the election that represents rival parties emerging from a civil war.

"As vote counting begins in Sudan's week-long general elections, analysts are giving the dire assessment that there will be no winners, and only losers in the process," VOA News said.

In refugee camps, the desert slums south of Khartoum, and certain regions like Darfur, abundant poverty and starvation still smite the country. The elections may be an attempt to get the country back on its feet, but many people still limp, crippled from the war, which has left its mark on the Sudanese economy and people.

The Sudanese government certainly has a long road ahead of them to lower the poverty rates and provide the necessary resources to help prevent starvation, but it seems that they are finally beginning to recover from the damage that has built up over the past 60 years.

Greece receives bailout

By Zachary Lynn
STAFF WRITER

Greece, one of the most financially troubled of the eurozone countries, has just been offered \$30 billion euros in bailout money and loans.

These loans, announced April 11, are set to help relieve the large debt that Greece has incurred since the start of the financial crisis.

The 16 countries that share the euro agreed to the bailout program in a meeting on Sunday. The bailout program is expected to span three years, providing Greece with low interest rates of five percent, according to a report by Yahoo Finance.

These interest rates are far below the market rate of 7.3 percent.

The announcement of the bailout followed statements in early February about the nature of the financial crisis in Greece.

The Greek government reached a budget deficit of 12.7 percent — over three times the accepted maximum under European financial regulations.

Greece reached this deficit through years of spending beyond the means of the Greek economy.

Despite the assurance that the Greek deficit would not directly impact the country's future within the eurozone, the government's cost-cutting measures caused widespread protest in Athens and other major Greek cities, especially when the government announced the cutting of civil service salaries.

Rioting and protests have died down since their crescendo in early to mid-February, showing that the populace is waiting to see the government's next move.

Greece's crisis seems to have at least come as a warning to Portugal,

Ireland, Italy, and Spain. These four other European countries, as noted by The Wall Street Journal, have potentially similar financial troubles but have yet to announce so.

"Today, with the Eurogroup decision, the safety net has taken shape. European solidarity has been fleshed out," Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou said.

The press release shows hopes that this may be a sign of greater European Union solidarity in the midst of financial crisis.

Reported by The Financial Post on Sunday, the bailout package is expected to be one of the largest in history.

The International Monetary Fund has pledged \$10 billion euros in loans in the first year, which was more than was delivered to both Mexico and Argentina during their financial crises.

The deal was formalized after the euro plunged sharply in the previous trading week and the yield on Greek 10-year treasury bonds hit 7.5 percent, the highest yield since 1998, according to Sky News.

However, both investors and the Greek government made it clear that the bailout package is a safety net, only in case Greece can no longer raise the funds to pay off its large debt resulting from high interest rates on international markets.

The bailout package could not have come at a better time, according to Yahoo Finance. Greece has to find \$11.5 billion euros by May, and a total of \$54 billion euros by the end of 2010 to begin paying off the \$300 billion euro debt.

With the opening of the trading day on Monday, the euro rose sharply against the dollar and the pound, as the announcement of the bailout package spread.

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