

Geography In The News™



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SOUTH SUDAN REFERENDUM

Southern Sudan is gearing up for an important referendum in early 2011. People of the region are voting whether to remain part of a united Sudan or become a separate state. If the south chooses to separate, the two sides will have some major issues to negotiate.

Sudan is located in northeast Africa with a narrow coastline on the Red Sea. It is Africa's largest country with 966,757 square miles (2.5 million sq. km), about a fourth the size of the United States. The country's northern half lies in the Sahara. The southern half is a semi-arid grassland called the Sahel.

Northern Sudan contains the most stable agricultural production, based mainly on irrigation, and contains the seat of government. Therefore, the country's wealth and power reside in the north, centered on Khartoum, the country's capital.

Sudan has a population of almost 42 million. Seventy percent of the people are Sunni Muslims who live mostly in the north. About 25 percent of Sudan's people practice indigenous beliefs and 5 percent are Christians, primarily residing in the south. Furthermore, the population is divided along racial lines with lighter-skin Arabs to the north and black Africans in the south.

Since Sudan received independence from the British in 1956, Islamic military governments have dominated the country's politics. During the second half of the 20th century, Sudan suffered two lengthy civil wars. These wars were complex and driven by the north's economic, political and social domination of the non-

Muslim, non-Arab southern Sudanese.

Sudan's first civil war ended in 1972. In 1983, the second war began, displacing more than four million people. Over the next 20 years, the war set off large migrations as people fled the shooting. Famines during that time contributed to the deaths of an estimated two million people. That war was Africa's longest running civil war.

In 2005, the Sudanese government signed a final North/South Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) with the southern rebels. The CPA granted the south autonomy for six years. In January 2011, the agreement ends and a referendum for permanent southern independence will be held.

According to Reuters AlertNet, should the referendum pass, north and south Sudan will have to negotiate numerous important issues. First, five major demarcated borders between the two regions are in dispute. Some communities are renounc-

ing those boundaries because their location will determine which side controls major oil fields. Second, approximately 90 percent of Sudan's oil fields are in the south. Ninety-

eight percent of southern Sudan's government revenue is generated from oil money. In fact, oil revenue makes up 60 percent of the GDP of the entire country. Landlocked South Sudan's only export route is a pipeline that runs north to Port Sudan on the Red Sea. If the south becomes independent, the two sides will have to negotiate how to divide oil revenue, as well as any fees for use of the pipeline. Under old British colonial treaties, Egypt gets the lion's share of water rights from the Nile River. Sudan receives about 22 percent of the total water rights, to the chagrin of the other seven Nile Basin member states, Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo. If the referendum passes, north and south will have to determine how to divide the 650 billion cubic feet (18.5 billion cubic meters) of water a year Sudan receives from the Nile.

In addition, questions of citizenship and the rights of those citizens to work or live across borders will require renegotiation.

The International Monetary Fund estimates Sudan has a national debt of US \$34 billion. The north will likely want the south to take on a portion of that debt. The south is resisting that idea, arguing that the north has used some of those borrowed funds for decades to wage war on the south.

The situation in Sudan is very complex. Some analysts even wonder if the south will be better off after separation. Right now, violent inter-tribal conflicts and rising food insecurity in this region of eight million are constant concerns. Approximately 40 percent of the population is moderately or severely food insecure, meaning they just don't have enough to eat.

The situation in Sudan is another example of residual problems with boundaries imposed by colonial powers that did not consider the racial, religious and cultural characteristics of its inhabitants.

And that is *Geography in the News*™. June 25, 2010. #1047.

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Sources: GITN #595, "Troubled Sudan," October 25, 2001; <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1994209,00.html?xid=rss-topstories>; and <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/IRIN/5a53839a9d3da5bd722b98c585f08141.htm>