

Sudan Democracy First Group

Sudan Democracy First Group:

An Open Letter to President Carter

April 15, 2010

Dear Mr President,

It is with regret that we find ourselves compelled to write this letter to you on the eve of the close of polling in the Sudanese "elections", three days before the expected declaration of victory for the National Congress Party (NCP) and its indicted President.

Once more we are writing to ask you to withdraw your observer mission from Sudan and salvage your own personal reputation and that of the Carter Center. Your mission is based on the *Declaration of Principles for International Observation and Code of Conduct for International Observers* which defines democratic elections as, "an expression of sovereignty, which belongs to the people of a country, the free expression of whose will provides the basis for the authority and legitimacy of government". It further recognises that, "the rights of citizens to vote and to be elected at periodic, genuine democratic elections are internationally recognized human rights".

As you will be aware over the last 5 days there have been hundreds of reports of interference with the right to vote from domestic sources, including the media, party agents, and independent civil society groups. The election has been riddled with massive irregularities and fraud not only with respect to matters relating to the voting itself such as the absence of candidates from ballot papers, the rigging of voter registration, and the use of non-permanent voter ink, but also commission of crimes such as the burning of election centers, the beating of voters, forced voting based on violent threats, summary trials of citizens in Khartoum, arrest of candidates, attacks on domestic monitors and so on. Indeed even Mr Alhaj Warrag, a prominent journalist and co founder of SDFG was charged under the Sudanese Penal Code with "waging war against the state" simply on the basis that he wrote an article on April 6th which called for a boycott of the already rigged elections.

It may be as a result of language and cultural barriers that you do not comprehend these incidents, but it is astonishing to us that your public statements since your arrival completely run counter to the on-the-ground reports and realities, seeming to only echo the pronouncements of the NCP and officials from the National Election Commission (NEC). In fact despite your Center's declared policy of not making public statements during the course of voting, you appear to have judged it necessary to continually speak to the media and to make statements about the election. For example on the 13th of April you told AFP that the problems being reported were "administrative problems" that there was "no evidence of fraud so far as I know."

These statements not only completely ignored the facts and realities on the ground during the polling days, but also jeopardise the efforts of your own staff to monitor the elections fairly and prepare an accurate and credible report. Your statements also undermine the positions of the major political forces

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and only serve to inflame the fragile political and security context. The boycott of the elections by the majority of the Sudanese in fact helped to prevent the threat of violence, contributing to maintaining the fragile social stability. If there had been a real choice could you imagine the reaction of millions of Sudanese encountering the massive irregularities and fraud which have unfolded during the polling days. You should indeed thank those who boycotted the elections for saving Sudanese lives by preventing bloody confrontation.

Our belief as SDFG is that the opening of the polls was simply the second phase of the well prepared rigging process for this election. The pre-polling prerequisites for legitimising the victory of the NCP and its President were already in place well before April 11.th As our latest public statement put it, “the census results were manipulated, constitutionally inconsistent laws were deployed restricting basic freedoms, electoral constituencies were delineated to suit the interests of the NCP, the voter register was maneuvered around predictable and determined outcomes (places and votes), and State resources were monopolized, including access to the media and corrupt and unlimited expenditure during the campaign.”

The Carter Center had already reported on these major violations of the pre-election process: indeed the assessment of the Center was one of the main bases upon which the major political parties made the decision to boycott the elections. You will be very aware that Center *itself* was also a prime target of this intimidatory violence with its staff suffering harassment, arrest, interrogation and expulsion. We are completely at a loss to understand why your public statements contradict not only those of independent Sudanese voters and major political and civic forces of Sudan but also the findings and assessments—*and experience*—of the Carter Center. Your latest statements have given rise to distrust on the part of Sudanese people towards the Carter Center that will certainly overshadow its impartiality.

In Darfur after issue of the arrest warrant for President the violent threats and attacks by the NCP on the international aid community and Sudanese civil society went largely unchallenged by the international community. Forced submission to the power of the NCP paralysed the Darfur region, creating an increased state of fear. Once again in the context of these elections the vicious threats and attacks against the international community – this time against election observers –have been swallowed with little protest, let alone withdrawal and refusal to lend legitimacy. Sudanese people watch as the international community once again abandons the civic and political rights of the citizen and the future of democracy to the ascendancy of the NCP. The international community already failed when they sacrificed justice in Darfur for an illusory peace with the Darfur Peace Agreement, and they achieved neither. Now with the current elections internationals need to learn that peace and democracy are also inter-related and interdependent: there is no room for further failure that costs more Sudanese lives.

We note with appreciation that European Union observers pulled out of Darfur: yet you did not, relying on an inexperienced UNAMID assessment. UNAMID officers were kidnapped in the last days as a statement against their complicity in these elections. Was Mr Ibrahim Gambari the head of UNAMID the appropriate authority to give the go ahead to the Carter Centre to deploy and monitor elections in the war zone of Darfur? The internally displaced communities, Darfurian civil society, rebel groups, and major political parties had all said elections in Darfur were impossible—whether in terms of their very conduct, fairness or appropriateness. The Carter Center’s deployment and monitoring of polling in Darfur

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is only adding to the political and security fragmentation of Darfur. We are sorry to see now that your judgement about elections in Darfur only adds to the questions which were raised about your statements in 2007 on the scale of the atrocities in Darfur when they were used indirectly to support NCP propaganda at that time.

As a civil society Sudanese coalition including representatives from a range of communities, farmers, workers, displaced people and activists, we appreciate the international community's acts of solidarity and support towards Sudan. We are committed to the rules and principles of international instruments and institutions. We will however openly reject any paternalism or neo-colonial attitudes towards the will of the people of Sudan.

Mr. President: As a leader coming from a country which has progressed through a long heritage of democratic principles and practices, we expected you to respect and observe that human beings, regardless of their wealth, colour of skin or geographical location are entitled to exercise their political will safely, freely and fairly. This is the only sustainable means for peace and stability.

We are deeply disappointed Mr President that despite your avowed independence as observer and your profile as a leader of democracy in your country you appear to have become part of the recent invasion of conservatism and international and regional actors to pressurise Sudanese political forces to not boycott the elections. SDFG and many advocacy groups have reported and documented the orchestrated efforts led by the US Special Envoy to Sudan, Scott Gration, to bring on board leaders such as former South African President Mbeki, organisations such as the Arab League, individual countries, and pro government regional NGOs. As we noted in our last statement which challenged such kinds of international interference, the right of self determination for the people of South Sudan, and popular consultation for the people of Blue Nile and South Kordofan, must be protected and implemented on time with international support, "without any compromise or connection with the current corrupted electoral process".

The Carter Center's reputation is on the line in Sudan, with the imminent reproduction of a regime with a history of two decades of repression and violence and the future of peace, stability and democracy in Sudan in the balance.

We ask you to consider your position very carefully and withdraw prior to the announcement of the already known results of these "elections".

**Yours sincerely,
Sudan Democracy First Group**

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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