



# PROJECT *on* Middle East Democracy

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**"Referendum in South Sudan and the Road to Independence"**  
**The Heritage Foundation**  
**214 Massachusetts Ave NE, Washington DC 20002**  
**Thursday, February 25, 2:00pm – 3:30pm**

The Heritage Foundation hosted a panel discussion on Thursday entitled, "Referendum in South Sudan and the Road to Independence." **Ray Walsler**, Ph.D., Senior Policy Analyst at The Heritage Center moderated the event with **Jon Temin**, Director of the Sudan Program at USIP (United States Institute for Peace), Amb. **Richard Williamson**, former U.S. Special Envoy to Sudan, and Amb. **Ezekial Lol Gatkuoth**, Head of Mission to the U.S. for the Government of South Sudan speaking.

**Ray Walsler** gave introductory remarks and posed questions to the panel. He asked if the South Sudanese government could create a viable state, if Sudanese President **Omar al-Bashir** would "play by the rules," and if the U.S. and the international community would play an active role in the transition process in South Sudan. Amb. Richard Williamson began the panel discussion by delving into a brief history of political and ethnic conflict in the Sudan. He said that the country suffered from over 200 years of marginalization of various ethnic groups by a small Arab minority. Placing the number of ethnic groups in Sudan at about 600, Williamson said that there has never been a politically united Sudan since its independence. He also went on to state that many if not most spectators were surprised at the generally peaceful environment and gave credit to President **Barack Obama** and U.N. Secretary General **Ban-ki Moon** for their recently increased role in helping promote the referendum.

Williamson cautioned however, that many of the issues stipulated under the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005 (CPA) have not been resolved. Both the South and the North have to negotiate on economic and territorial issues including: the status of the disputed Abyei region and other border issues, oil resources and oil sharing revenues, debt relief, as well as citizenship issues regarding southerners living and working in the North and serving in its armed forces. Williamson also cautioned against what he said were Khartoum's delaying tactics, in an effort to manipulate the U.S. and international community into inadvertently pressure Juba into concessions on these issues. He also said that South Sudan will face serious development issues and that the U.S. and international community would need to provide critical assistance.

Other causes of concern that the ambassador outlined were a potential weakening of South Sudanese President **Salva Kiir's** standing as independence would bring about political jockeying between rival factions in the government. The North continues to face international isolation over violence and genocide in Darfur and may be tempted to increasingly turn to Islam and Sharia to consolidate power and legitimacy. He further cautioned that the focus on development aid to sustain the South cannot preclude the international community forgetting the situation in Darfur.

Amb. **Ezekial Lol Gatkuoth** reiterated Williamson point that most observers has expected the referendum to be a "nightmare," but that it largely proceeded without complication and that the vote for independence has been certified and accepted by all parties. He also praised the role of the

international community for its technical, moral, and political support, particularly the United States. He emphasized Williamson's concern over the status of Abyei due its oil resources and history of ethnic conflict. He said he thought an agreement over the status of Abyei, its resources, and cross border nomad population would be best if it could be achieved by July, when South Sudan is set to formally announce independence. Lack of an agreement could possible lead to renewed violence.

Gatkuoth also spoke about the development assistance South Sudan will need along with the technical expertise of foreign donors. He said that the Government of South Sudan has asked the U.K. to help demarcate the border as the former colonial power. Development assistance would also need to cover various competencies such as overall good governance, security, and infrastructure, particularly road building, schools, and hospital clinics. He also emphasized food security and helping fuel agriculture in the country. Gatkuoth also said that believed that South Sudan would be a viable state stating that what the government has achieved in the South over the past five years greatly eclipsed anything the government in Khartoum has done in the last fifty. He advocated for debt leveling and sanction lifting on the South so that the new country could start with a fresh slate along with a mini-Marshall Plan for the development assistance.

**Jon Temin** asserted that although the referendum was largely peaceful and successful, South Sudan is, "not out of the woods yet." He gave credit to the Sudanese and U.S. government, in particular their role over the past six months and called the whole CPA process a rare example of conflict prevention. He then questioned how long the euphoria over the referendum or "the honeymoon" would last. He also questioned the high expectations in the South for independence to deliver tangible results given its status as one of the poorest regions in the world. The South Sudanese government is young and inexperienced, he asserted, and would have a short window to demonstrate its ability to deliver. While he reiterated that the U.S. is a friend to South Sudan, the government should not "get a free pass" on its role in the development process.

Temin also stressed the importance of the future of North Sudan. The North will retain a large population and the government may look to turn to a larger role for Sharia law. He stressed the importance of continuing to engage the Khartoum government in order to ascertain what kind of government it will be. The South, he argued, has clear processes in place to write a new constitution, but the North has not set parameters.

In a response to questions from the audience, Amb. Gatkuoth said that NGOs could help the grassroots assistance efforts to smaller village by providing basic education, health clinics, and clean drinking water. Amb. Williamson spoke of the need for the development of the agricultural sector since South Sudan, rich in arable land and rainfall, should not need to depend on donors for food. Temin stressed the need for local level conflict management to help resolve inter-ethnic clashes and developing a common sense of nationhood for South Sudanese. Williamson responded that ethnic divisions are a reality and ethnic issues must be moved into the political arena in order to deal with the violence.

Williamson also criticized the U.S. role in aid and assistance saying the administration has been too gentle and "gingerly" during the transition from humanitarian aid to development aid. He said he thought the humanitarian aid needed to be shifted over to development aid in greater numbers and more quickly. The bulk of the aid would come from USAID in the form of local and community assistance. Gatkuoth also spoke of the role that Norway and China have been playing in aid and development with the Chinese contributing billions in investment and training diplomats. He did however reiterate that without the U.S. there would have been no peace agreement or referendum.

Temin spoke of his desire to see increased regional assistance and advisement from African nations like Kenya. Williamson replied that Uganda and Ethiopia are already involved with the Juba government, particularly the Ethiopians who trained the Sudan People's Liberation Army (South Sudan military).