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Civil Society and Stakeholders Call for Urgent, Coordinated Action to Strengthen South Sudan's Electoral Preparedness

Juba, South Sudan | 1 October 2026

The South Sudanese Network for Democracy and Elections (SSuNDE) and the East and Horn of Africa Election Observation Network (E-HORN) have called for urgent, coordinated and measurable action to address outstanding institutional, legal, operational, security and civic-space challenges ahead of South Sudan's scheduled 22 December 2026 elections.

The call follows the 2026 South Sudan Country Forum, held in Juba from 23–24 September 2026 under the theme “Ready or Not: Assessing South Sudan's Preparedness for the 22 December 2026 Elections.” The Forum brought together representatives of national institutions, electoral and oversight bodies, civil society organizations, civic networks, women and youth representatives, organizations of persons with disabilities and other marginalized groups, media organizations, human rights defenders, political and community stakeholders, and regional and international partners.

The Forum assessed electoral preparedness across the legal and constitutional framework, institutional readiness, voter registration and electoral logistics, civic and political space, security conditions, inclusive participation, access to reliable information, and electoral complaints and dispute-resolution mechanisms.

Participants emphasized that electoral credibility depends not only on polling day, but on the broader environment in which elections are conducted—including a lawful framework, independent and prepared institutions, meaningful civic and political space, inclusive participation, reliable information, adequate security, and accessible mechanisms for resolving electoral disputes.

Mr. James Okony Dau, Chairman of SSuNDE

“The Forum has provided an important opportunity for national stakeholders to take an honest and evidence-based look at South Sudan's electoral preparedness. The message from the Forum is clear: the remaining time requires urgent, coordinated and measurable action by all institutions and stakeholders within their respective mandates.”

“An election is not simply an event that takes place on polling day. Credibility depends on the preparedness of electoral institutions, an enabling civic and political environment, inclusive participation, reliable information, adequate security and accessible mechanisms for addressing electoral complaints and disputes.”

Mr. Dau further emphasized the importance of regular public communication and transparency concerning electoral preparations, particularly considering the compressed electoral timetable and the number of interconnected tasks that remain to be completed.

Lony Ruot, President of SALF¹

“Our assessment is that South Sudan’s electoral preparedness is an institutional and systemic responsibility. The gaps identified cannot be treated as isolated technical issues; they require coordinated action by electoral institutions, security institutions, the judiciary, political actors and other relevant stakeholders.

The Forum considered SALF’s June 2026 research assessment, which estimated preparedness at approximately 35 percent for the National Elections Commission, 20 percent for the security sector, and 15 percent for the judiciary and electoral dispute-resolution mechanisms, against a 50 percent minimum preparedness benchmark. These figures are findings of SALF’s assessment and do not constitute official performance ratings of the respective institutions.

What is required now is a coordinated readiness mechanism with clear responsibilities, measurable benchmarks, regular public reporting, and practical measures to address identified financial, logistical, technical and human-resource gaps.

Mr. Ruot also stressed the importance of protecting constitutional freedoms and ensuring that security measures facilitate, rather than unduly restrict, lawful civic and political participation. He reaffirmed the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) as the legal and political framework for the transitional period and called for its continued respect and implementation.

He urged the political leadership to sustain cooperation and respect the collegial arrangements among the parties’ signatory to the R-ARCSS, while addressing differences through dialogue and constructive engagement. He further called for an inclusive and meaningful national dialogue on the future of South Sudan, bringing together political actors and other relevant stakeholders to help chart a peaceful and nationally owned way forward.

Mr. Ruot emphasized that continued commitment to the R-ARCSS, inclusive dialogue and respect for constitutional freedoms are essential to advancing sustainable peace and supporting South Sudan’s transition towards democratic governance.

Dr. Kennedy Masime, Authorized Representative of E-HORN

“Inclusive participation must remain at the centre of the electoral process. Women, young people, persons with disabilities, displaced persons, returnees and other underserved communities must have meaningful opportunities to participate throughout the electoral cycle.”

“The electoral process also requires accessible and reliable information. Misinformation and disinformation, weak data-protection safeguards and barriers to information can undermine public confidence and disproportionately affect communities that already face difficulties accessing reliable information.”

“We call for strengthened civic and voter education, accurate and accessible electoral information, protection of personal and electoral data, responsible media reporting, and an enabling environment for peaceful and meaningful civic and political participation. The region stands in solidarity with the people and Government of South Sudan in supporting the country’s transition from conflict to lasting peace through a lawful, credible, inclusive and peaceful electoral process, anchored in respect for the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) and the Transitional Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan, 2011, as amended.”

Key Areas Requiring Immediate Attention

The Forum identified several interconnected areas requiring urgent attention, including:

¹ Standard Action Liaison Force

- Electoral institutions and operational preparedness, including voter registration, electoral logistics, personnel, polling arrangements, voter education and complaints mechanisms;
- Legal and constitutional clarity, particularly on outstanding transitional, representation and institutional questions;
- Civic and political space, including freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly and movement;
- Electoral security, including coordinated security arrangements, civilian protection and prevention of election-related violence;
- Inclusive participation, particularly the participation of women, youth, persons with disabilities, displaced persons, returnees and other underserved communities;
- Information, media and data protection, including access to accurate electoral information and responsible responses to misinformation and disinformation; and
- Electoral dispute resolution, including accessible and effective mechanisms for addressing electoral disagreements through lawful and peaceful institutional processes.

The Forum also called upon the National Elections Commission to maintain and publicly demonstrate its institutional independence and impartiality, publish and regularly update a comprehensive electoral operational timetable, strengthen consultation with stakeholders, and establish accessible electoral complaints and dispute-resolution mechanisms.

Joint Call for Action

SSuNDE and E-HORN call upon all relevant institutions and stakeholders to discharge their respective constitutional, statutory and institutional responsibilities with urgency, transparency, accountability and cooperation throughout the electoral cycle, consistent with the commitments and recommendations set out in the Communiqué of 24 September 2026.

The organizations further encourage national, regional and international partners to provide appropriate technical cooperation, capacity-building, skill transfers, electoral observation support, study tours and assistance aimed at strengthening electoral integrity, inclusive participation, civic space, election security and dispute resolution.

The Forum concluded that a credible electoral process depends upon the entire electoral environment, rather than polling day alone. Participants therefore called for sustained cooperation to address identified gaps and risks and to contribute to a peaceful, inclusive, transparent, lawful and credible electoral process.

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