



RADIO MIRAYA: SUDAN REFERENDUM HITS THE AIRWAVES

Journalists from Radio Miraya, run jointly by the UN Mission in Sudan and Fondation Hirondelle, hold village debates and host live broadcasts with voters during the referendum registration period, Pachong, Sudan, 20 November 2010. (UN Photo/Tim McKulka)

As the leading regional broadcaster in southern Sudan, the peacekeeping radio station Miraya FM played a major role in voter education and information dissemination about the 2011 referendum for the region.

Prior to the start of referendum voter registration on 15 November, Miraya produced and aired a series of public service announcements on the 2009 Southern Sudan and Abyei Referendum Acts, the voter registration process and voter rights in Arabic, English and 10 local languages. Miraya created four special referendum programmes.

"Referendum Talk is a live one-hour show where we give the Southern Sudan Referendum Commission (SSRC) the opportunity to tell the listeners what stage of the referendum process we are in and what has been done," said Celia Koh, Senior Radio Coordinator. Listeners could text and call in their questions on this interactive Thursday show.

The pre-recorded "Village Debates" programme takes the Miraya microphone to the grassroots and airs every Saturday aiming for visits to all 10 of the southern Sudan states.

"Through our correspondents and travelling teams of journalists, Miraya has given Sudanese in all parts of the South the opportunity to join the discussion about the referendum, and the consequences of both separation and unity," said Chief of Radio Quade Hermann.

"Referendum Diary," a 30-minute roundup of all weekly referendum news activities, also aired every Saturday. The diary, which is part of the special referendum section at the mirayafm.org website, received an impressive number of hits, Ms. Koh said.

The last of the four programmes, "Referendum Watch," started airing in December, hosting experts who discuss post-referendum political, historical and economic issues from the differing viewpoints of unity and separation.

CAPACITY BUILDING

To ensure objective and professional coverage by its reporters, Miraya developed a Referenda and Popular Consultations Charter published in English and Arabic.

According to Miraya Editor-in-Chief Jean-Claude Labrecque, the charter governs the station's coverage of the referendum process from campaigns to post-referendum issues depending on the outcome of the 9 January 2011 poll.

"People trust Miraya, and it is because we work hard at upholding our journalistic principles of maintaining fair and balanced coverage of these sensitive issues," Ms. Hermann said.

The reporters underwent intensive preparatory training that started in August. In the first phase, Miraya invited experts to discuss referenda and popular consultation law and the history of the peace process. SSRC members were also asked to describe the commission's role.

"The second aspect of our training was to help our journalists prepare to report," said the station's training chief, Christopher Singh. To that end, Miraya invited seasoned, Sudan-based foreign cor-

respondents to share their experiences with its young reporters. The station has also been training state radio journalists in the area.

After the vote, the Miraya editors monitored the referendum reports. "The (reporters) still need fine tuning. We are coaching them and taking corrective measures and we will continue to do this," Mr. Singh said.

Miraya is a UN radio station run in partnership with the Swiss-based Fondation Hironnelle. It was established to support implementation of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement and broadcasts throughout southern Sudan.

UNAMID: STRIVING TO PROTECT DARFUR'S MOST VULNERABLE

As dawn breaks, the Formed Police Unit (FPU) has been up for more than an hour. A quick breakfast is followed by a comprehensive briefing and equipment inspection. A radio check by the team leader begins the patrol.

This is just one of approximately 200 patrols that will be conducted today by the African Union - United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). The aim is to provide protection to the people, especially those most vulnerable.

Although the primary responsibility of protecting civilians lies with the Government of the Sudan, UNAMID has been tasked by the

UN Security Council with making "full use of its mandate and capabilities, giving priority in decisions about the use of available capacity and resources to the protection of civilians across Darfur." While this remains at the heart of UNAMID's mandate, it proved to be among its greatest challenges in 2010.

Operating in a region the size of Spain and with limited resources, the world's largest current peacekeeping operation continued to face significant barriers to its work throughout the year. Among these were movement restrictions, the obstruction of humanitarian access, an unstable security situation on the ground and threats to

the safety and security of UNAMID personnel. On too many occasions, peacekeepers were hampered in their efforts to respond as effectively as they would have liked to incidents that resulted in civilian casualties or humanitarian aid being prevented from reaching those most in need. Over the course of the year more than 1,300 civilians lost their lives to violence.

Efforts on the political front continued throughout 2010. In October, the Joint Mediation Support Team, with UNAMID's facilitation, re-convened talks between the Government of Sudan and the Liberation and Justice Movement, a relatively recently formed rebel