

South Sudan to Secede from North

Sudan has faced years of civil war. Hundreds of thousands of people have been killed in north/south violence. But that has all come to an end as South Sudan has overwhelmingly voted to secede from Northern Sudan.

The referendum was part of a 2005 peace accord that ended the north/south civil war. The comprehensive peace accord which was brokered by the U.S. will also remove Sudan from their terrorist list and could renew diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Sudan Unit Leader with Africa Inland Mission, Phil Byler, speaking from Sudan, says, "99 percent of the people voted to separate. Over 80 percent of the registered voters voted. And North Sudan government says they will accept the results."

Byler adds, "That is just an incredible answer to prayer. Many people compare it to the coming down of the Berlin Wall."

While the vote affirms the secession, it hasn't actually happened yet. "There's going to be an interim period between now and the 9th of July, this year, 2011. During this period, they have not officially separated; they're just planning to separate July the 9th," Byler says.

In the meantime they will establish an interim government and schedule full elections. Byler excitedly says, "This is a very highly tribal nation, and for them to come together and to pull off this incredible unity of voting for this referendum this way is just unbelievable."

However, the news isn't all good news. The bad news is that the Muslim north could become more fundamentalist. Byler says, "They will establish Sharia law in a much stronger way in the

north. And I expect the Christians will be quite marginalized and probably suffer significant persecution."

Is it a concern of his? Byler says, "Well, yes and no. The church often grows through persecution rather than go under with it. Who knows how the Lord will use it."

In the meantime Byler is asking Christians to pray for a dependent church in South Sudan. "We as a mission believe that now is the time for them to take the ownership and move forward with their own programs and let us help strengthen and support those."

Byler is also asking Christians to pray that the representative government will include all of the South Sudanese tribes. If not, Byler says, "There's been one large tribe that has been predominately in power. If that is maintained, there will be long-standing tribal divisions, and that could throw us into a civil war."