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From: O'Neill, Douglas S
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Subject: U.S. group tells Sudan to speed up vote preparations

KHARTOUM, Aug 20 (Reuters) - Sudan must swiftly approve a budget to pay for elections in April and speed up preparations if the vote is to go ahead on time, the U.S.-based Carter Center which will monitor the ballot said on Thursday. The votes for the presidency, parliament and other bodies is part of the democratic transformation promised in the 2005 peace deal that ended a north-south civil war that lasted two decades. They will be the first multi-party elections in over 20 years. "The Center reported serious concerns about slippage in the overall electoral calendar," a report said, adding the organization was also worried about new laws and continued restrictions on civil liberties. "(It is an) ambitious schedule but will only be viable if the government of national unity and the NEC (National Elections Commission) take immediate action to ensure that further delays are avoided," the report said.