



South Sudan Catholic Bishops'
Secretariat

SSCBS – JUBA

South Sudan Catholic Bishops' Secretariat
P.O. Box 258 – Juba
South Sudan

MESSAGE OF THE SOUTH SUDAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS

There is Posterity for the Man of Peace (*Psalms 37:37*)

To

The Government of the Republic South Sudan,
International Community,
Church and Other Humanitarian Agencies
Our Clergy, Religious & People of good will

Preamble:

We, the Catholic Bishops and Ordinaries of South Sudan, at the conclusion of the Ecclesiastical Province Meeting held at CRS Compound Juba (June 27-29, 2023) send you greetings, Peace of Christ and God's blessings. This Message comes as an Urgent call for Peace and Humanitarian Assistance regarding the following key areas of concern.

1. Situation in The Sudan

The conflict in the Sudan which started on Sunday April 15, 2023 has posed a big challenge and suffering to both Sudanese and South Sudanese people who were and are still there in big numbers. These include the loss of many human lives, the destruction of property, including Church's property, loss of businesses, massive displacement both internally and abroad and the resultant humanitarian crises.

The conflict as far as we know is a power struggle between two generals: Gen. Abdel Fattah Burhan, the Head of the Supreme Council and Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and Gen. Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Hemeti), the Deputy Head of the Supreme Council and Head of Rapid Support Forces (RSF), and their associated armed groups. The war is simply a conflict between two armed groups within the government.

The ordinary civilians of Sudan have made their wishes known through the non-violent protests which overthrew President Bashir in 2019, and which continued after the new military takeover in 2021. They want a democratic civilian government, and they want the two separate military forces to be merged and to come under civilian control. We, the Bishops of South Sudan call upon the warring parties to respect the will of the Sudanese people.

Human rights abuses are taking place on daily bases, killing, looting and raping. Hospitals are being destroyed, and essential services such as access to food, water and electricity are being denied to the civilian population. In many Sudanese cities heavy weapons are being used indiscriminately and civilians are being killed. These are unacceptable and we condemn the acts in the strongest possible term.

We are also deeply concerned about the regional and international components to the conflict. The conflict is destabilising for the whole region, already fragile and weakened by internal conflicts. We call upon the international community to prevail over the Sudan's warring parties to choose dialogue as means to resolve their differences.

We express our sadness and concern for the suffering of our brothers and sisters in the Sudan. Our thoughts and prayers are with you. We continue to pray for our brother Bishops; Archbishop Michael Didi, The Metropolitan Archbishop of Khartoum, H.G. Luis Miguel Munoz Cardaba, The Apostolic Nuncio to the Sudan, His Eminence, Gabriel Cardinal Zubeir Wako, H.L. Tombe Trille, the Bisho of El Obeid and H.L. Daniel Adwok Kur, the Auxiliary Bishop of Khartoum with all the Church personnel, the Christians, and all Sudanese citizens as they suffer the horrible impact of the war. We honour the civilians who have resisted dictatorial military regimes in Sudan for many years, and we call on the international community to recognise them and to support their non-violent struggle for justice, peace and a democratic civilian government.

The Catholic Church in South Sudan will continue alongside people of good will who are who already involved, to provide moral support and solidarity to its brothers and sisters in Sudan, welcoming those Church personnel who have fled to South Sudan, and speaking out internationally and regionally on their behalf. We shall continue to play our main role which is humanitarian, through our Caritas South Sudan, Church and other international development and humanitarian agencies in supporting and caring for the refugees who come from Sudan. We also encourage you our Christian faithful to open your doors in love, charity and solidarity to

those your brothers and sisters coming from the Sudan.

We commend the government of South Sudan for welcoming refugees fleeing from Sudan, and we urge them to continue to do so. We call upon the international community to provide needed humanitarian aid both within Sudan and in South Sudan and other neighbouring countries which are hosting Sudanese refugees.

2. Situation in South Sudan

We have reflected on the situation in South Sudan. The country is not fully at peace. The current power-sharing government needs to demonstrate political will to bring about a just and peaceful dispensation in the country. Indeed, given the degree of trauma of the major political actors, it's unlikely that they have the capacity to do so even if they wanted to. The R-ARCSS has not resolved the root causes of the conflicts in South Sudan but has merely created a mechanism where the elite can find a way of existing in an uneasy partnership at the expense of the ordinary people. It is a flawed process, and there will never be peace in South Sudan as long as the international community insists on this type of model.

Although the President said many times that he will not return the country to war, there is violence in many parts of the country which cannot simply be dismissed as “local”, “communal” or “tribal”; it relates to the power struggles currently going on within the “power sharing” national government in Juba. While calling on all parties to implement fully the agreement they have signed, nevertheless we question whether the current model, which shares power between those elites who have taken up arms at the expense of the ordinary civilians, is a sustainable mechanism for development, peace and justice.

The country is unable to manage the national economy, and this is leading to hardship, poverty, and despair, nor to provide security and basic services to the people. Insecurity remains high in rural areas, which should be the production areas to boost food production for the country, already suffering from unprecedented levels of food insecurity, which is expected to worsen due to persistent climatic conditions such as excessive flooding and drought. Compounded by the insecurity in Sudan and the economic meltdown, the government needs to seriously consider the issue of peace so that South Sudan is self-dependent economically. We urge our leaders to serve rather than rule, and to work for the good of all people rather than for their own narrow interests (*Pope Francis' Message, February, 2023*).

We call upon all parties, as well as regional and international mediators, to examine anew, the method which will truly benefit the people. We believe that only by listening to the voice of the ordinary people and addressing the root causes of the problems will our nation ever truly be at peace. We are worried that the conflicts in neighbouring countries such as Sudan, D.R. Congo (DRC) and Central African Republic (CAR) may spill across the borders and have a negative impact on South Sudan's internal conflicts.

In his 2017 World Day of Peace Message, our Holy Father Pope Francis said, "Can violence achieve any goal of lasting value? Or does it merely lead to retaliation and a cycle of deadly conflicts that benefit only a few "warlords"? Violence is not the cure for our broken world. Countering violence with violence leads at best to forced migrations and enormous suffering, because vast amounts of resources are diverted to military ends and away from the everyday needs of young people, families experiencing hardship, the elderly, the infirm and the great majority of people in our world. At worst, it can lead to the death, physical and spiritual life of many people, if not of all." We see these sad predictions coming true every day in South Sudan. We call on all the political and military leaders, all those bearing arms, and all the people of South Sudan to refuse violence under any circumstances. The Holy Father while addressing from the Presidential Palace in Juba on 3rd February 2023, warned of the danger of violence when he said: "in order that this land may not turn into a cemetery, but become once more a luxuriant garden, I beg you, with all my heart, to accept four simple words: not my words, but those of Christ. He (Jesus) spoke them in a garden, in Gethsemane, when to a disciple of his who had drawn a sword, he cried: 'No more of this' (Luke 22:51). So, "there is posterity for the man of peace (Ps: 37:37), let our leaders and all of us be peace builders.

The Church in South Sudan has played a major role in bringing an end to previous conflicts. We, in our turn, commit ourselves to honouring the pledge made by the Holy Father in support for a peaceful South Suda, and to continue to do everything in our power to bring peace and justice to our nation through non-violent means.

3. Ecumenical Action for Peace

The Ecumenical Pilgrimage for Peace by the Holy Father, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Moderator of the Church of Scotland in February emphasized peace by peaceful means. All three of the visiting global Church leaders encouraged non-violent solutions to South Sudan's

problems. The struggle for justice and peace has not been carried out by one Church alone. We commit ourselves to continuing to work as part of our South Sudan Council of Churches to implement the Action Plan for Peace (APP), focusing on the Gospel of non-violence which our Holy Father emphasises.

4. Becoming Truly Local Church

The year 2024 marks the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Catholic Church in the Sudan ceasing to be a "Missionary Territory" and becoming a local Church in its own right. As we prepare to celebrate the Golden Jubilee (fifty years) of our Church growth and the Fortieth Anniversary of the National Eucharistic Congress, we thank God for all those who have contributed to these great events of our faith. We thank God for our retired elders, Emeritus Gabriel Cardinal Zubeir Wako, and Emeritus Bishops Paride Taban and Erkolano Lodu Tombe.

We also thank God for those who have gone before us and we pray that the Church will continue to flourish, and to play its part in bringing about God's Kingdom of peace, justice, and love in our nations. We remember with gratitude our dear elder brother Bishop Emeritus Macram Max Gassis who went to join our Heavenly Father earlier this month. He was an outspoken voice for the poor and oppressed; for justice, peace, human rights, and freedom of religion; and he was a fierce opponent of slavery and war. He also played a major role in establishing the Sudan Catholic Bishops' Conference. May he rest in peace, Amen.

5. Final Appeal

Peace is a common good, and therefore we appeal and encourage all the Sudanese and South Sudanese people to work for peace and shun violence. The way forward for peace in Sudan to reduce people's suffering is peace process and not war. South Sudan is heading to the end of political transition period amidst inter-communal violence that has engulfed the nation. The deadline of December 2024 is fast closing and the slow pace of the implementation of the peace agreement is worrying. There is still more work to do in the implementation of the milestones provided for in the R-ARCSS implementation matrix.

We appeal to the Transitional Government of National Unity to expedite the finalisation of the Constitutions making process, the creation of one and unified National Armed Forces and their deployment, to conduct Census and finding a quick and durable solution to the return of IDPs

to their places and returnees from the neighbouring countries, and finally ensure fair, transparent, and credible elections are conducted on time. Bearing these situations in mind, we vividly remember the words of the Holy Father Pope Francis: "dear friends, it is time to move from words to deeds. It is time to turn a new page; it is the time for commitment to an urgent and much-needed transformation".

Finally, we wish to remind ourselves about our constant need for conversion. Bishops, priests and religious to be at forefront for the work of conversion and to put ourselves more intently at the service of our people. We welcome in special way our clergy and religious who have come to South Sudan following the violence in Khartoum. Through our word and example, may we guide our people along the path of peace and prosperity, which are given to all men of good will. To our beloved people of South Sudan, let us never loose hope and get tired of praying, working and contributing for what makes for true peace in our country.

On all of you we impart our Apostolic Blessings.

Given on the 30th June 2023 in Juba



1. H.G. Stephen Ameyu Martin Mulla,
The Metropolitan Archbishop of Juba & Vice President of SCBC



2. H.L. Barani Eduardo Hiiboro Kussala, Bishop of Tambura-Yambio



3. H.L. Stephen Nyodho Adhor, Bishop of Malakal



4. H.L. Matthew Remijo Adam MCCJ, Bishop of Wau



5. H.L. Christian Carlasarre MCCJ, Bishop of Rumbek



6. H.L. Alex Lodiong Sakor Eyobo, Bishop of Yei



7. H.L. Emmanuel Bernadino Lowi Napeta, Bishop of Torit



8. H.L. Santo Loku Pio Doggale, Auxiliary Bishop of Juba