

## 132. The Folly of Fighting

Yesterday, I saw a group of South Sudanese, relaxed and laughing, and looking very much at ease, in a grassy park beside the road. They looked secure and confident. There were four of them, and four cars parked next to them – not the latest cars but typical cars for young men owning their first vehicles. The problems of South Sudan were distant for them, I guess. No doubt they have relatives about whom they worry in South Sudan but I am currently on home leave in Australia where we are privileged to share great prosperity, opportunity and peace. It is easy to put the conflict in South Sudan out of mind.

The media alert the world to the folly of fighting and violence in Ukraine, Syria, Thailand, Egypt – and sometimes South Sudan, the not-so Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria and so on. What are especially disturbing are the attempts to justify violence in the name of religious commitment. Does anyone really believe a suicide bomber attacking innocent people is some kind of martyr? The brazen kidnapping of 200 girls in Nigeria is a startling example of the absurd abuse of innocent people in the name of some kind of cause. I refuse to call it genuine religion. What a blessing is peace! How futile is war!

Brother Denis sent me yesterday, from South Sudan, the latest bulletin of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Here are some of the sad facts for South Sudan as currently assessed by OCHA:

*More than 1.3 million South Sudanese have been displaced, of whom about 350,000 people have fled to Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan and Uganda.*

*There are up to 87,000 people sheltering in UN bases.*

*According to recent data, four million people are facing acute food insecurity.*

*The Ministry of Health declared a cholera outbreak in Juba, Central Equatoria, with 43 suspected cases and two deaths reported.*

*Insecurity continues to hamper education in Jonglei, Unity and Upper Nile states.*

*Partners are advocating with key stakeholders for the vacation of schools occupied by armed forces or displaced people to allow the resumption of education. Most schools in Bentiu and Bor towns remained closed.*

*Non-payment of teacher salaries has affected resumption of education in some sites. This is an ongoing issue.*

*Many primary school students have not sat for their final leaving examination.*

*Since January, 370,887 children aged 6-59 months were screened for acute malnutrition. 22,549 (6.3 per cent) were identified with severe acute malnutrition (SAM) and 46,948 (13.1 per cent) with moderate acute malnutrition (MAM).*

*For the same period 78,573 pregnant and lactating women (PLW) were screened for acute malnutrition and 20,571 (28.1 per cent) were identified with acute malnutrition*

Other unfortunate developments reported in the South Sudan conflict are the recruitment and deployment of child soldiers as well as the forced conscription of men who have been required, in some cases, to fight the people who were previously their friendly neighbours. It is hard to forgive the man who used to share tea with you when he reappears to loot your house – even if he has faced a choice of *'join us or be killed'*. A war against another country is a terrible conflict but often comes to a defined outcome; a war within ones own country is even more horrific with the internal divisions festering and lingering for years. The ultimate folly of fighting is that the hurts inflicted cannot be undone. Many years of healing and reconciliation will be needed. We pray this process is beginning in South Sudan. - Br Bill