

RELIGIOUS SUPERIORS' ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH SUDAN
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A MESSAGE OF SOLIDARITY, PEACE AND HOPE

TO THE PEOPLE OF SOUTH SUDAN

“It is impossible for us not to speak about what we have seen and heard”.

(Acts of the Apostles 4:20)

We, the 75 representatives of 29 Catholic Religious Congregations belonging to the Religious Superiors' Association of South Sudan (RSASS) that carry on evangelization offering various services in Church schools, dispensaries, hospitals and pastoral activities in dozens of parishes and missions across the seven Dioceses of South Sudan, gathered in Juba for our Annual Assembly to reflect on the Small Christian Communities, as a new way of being Church for the People of God, from 13th-15th May 2014, wish to send a message of solidarity, peace and hope to the people of South Sudan in this time of crisis and violence.

As your brothers and sisters, we are all mindful of each child, each woman, each man, each elderly person who has been affected by violence in South Sudan over the past five months. The blood of thousands of innocent people cries for justice. We cannot remain indifferent to the cry of the poor and the innocent who have lost their lives or are going through deep suffering and pain. ***“Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the soil” (Genesis 4:10).***

We wish, first of all, to offer our prayers for those who have fallen victims of this senseless violence and lost their lives in the various regions of the country where there are conflicts. Our hearts and our thoughts are with the bereaved families in these difficult moments of pain and loss. ***“Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord” (Psalm 31:25).***

Secondly, we stand in solidarity with the hundreds of thousands of brothers and sisters who had to flee their homes and seek protection in the bushes, swamps, at UN bases and in the neighbouring countries and, as consequence, have lost most of their belongings, opportunity to cultivate, jobs and school year and are still lacking what is basic for a decent life.

We are in solidarity also with the members of the Religious Congregations (Brothers, Sisters and Priests) who suffered harassments, narrowly escaped death and had their residences, churches, schools, hospitals and radio station attacked, looted and partially destroyed in Malakal, Leer, Ayod and Renk. We thank them for their great witness of solidarity and common cause with the people they are called to serve and grateful to God for saving and protecting their lives.

We equally express our solidarity with the local clergy and other church personnel of the Diocese of Malakal and with the Pastors of other Christian communities, as well as the people of other religions, who were forced to leave their homes, parishes, communities and the people entrusted to their pastoral care and seek refuge in Juba and other places because of

violence and insecurity in the states of Jonglei, Upper Nile and Unity. ***“I have witnessed the affliction of my people... and have heard their cry... I know well what they are suffering” (Exodus 3:7).***

Thirdly, we appreciate and are grateful to the churches and humanitarian agencies present and operating in South Sudan for their tireless efforts to provide shelter, protection, health care and other humanitarian aids and spiritual support to those affected by violence. Many thanks for the Religious Congregations that have been committed to praying with IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) at Juba UN camps for all this time. ***“I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40).***

Fourthly, we strongly condemn all kinds of violence and atrocities carried out by both Government forces and rebel groups over the course of the last five months in South Sudan. We reject all violation of human rights, looting of private and public properties, and re-affirm the inviolable dignity of the human person. Likewise, we condemn all forms of corruption, nepotism, greed and power struggle at the expense of thousands of innocent lives. We cannot condone the supplying of weapons and ammunitions, the aim of which is only to destroy and kill. ***“Yes, I know how many are your crimes, how grievous your sins: oppressing the just, accepting bribes, repelling the needy at the gate” (Amos 5:12).***

Fifthly, we appreciate the efforts of the Churches, Civil Societies, International Community, IGAD, AU and of the two warring parties to sign a peace deal to immediately cease all hostile activities and to allow humanitarian access and aid to reach out to people who are desperately in need. ***“Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God” (Mathew 5:9).***

Today is five months since conflicts began in South Sudan; we say NO to all kind of violence or whatever action that degrades human life and its dignity. Too much blood has been shed in this land. Too many lives have been lost. Too much destruction has taken place. We want peace, stability and development to all citizens of our young nation.

Therefore, we call on our brothers the President of South Sudan, Salva Kiir Mayardit, and on Dr. Riek Machar to honour the signed peace agreement to resolve the crisis in South Sudan and to seek sustainable peace and reconciliation through political dialogue. Both Government and rebel forces must be disciplined and kept under full control. Also, International Convention on war and human rights must be fully observed. Let us not forget those who lost their lives. ***“Wash yourselves clean! Put away your misdeeds from before my eyes; cease doing evil; learn to do good. Make justice your aim: redress the wronged, hear the orphan’s plea, defend the widow. Come now, let us set things right, says the Lord” (Isaiah 1:16-18).***

We remind all South Sudanese that God created people of every clan, tribe and nationality to live in peace, harmony and unity. We ask God to forgive our sins for the times we failed to live in peace and to heal our wounds and help us to be reconciled with one another. We are South Sudanese, sons and daughters of God, irrespective of ethnicity, colour and creed. Let us refrain from violence and seek justice, peace and reconciliation through the right channels and in a non-violent way. ***“Take every care to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds you together” (Ephesians 4:3).***

Finally, we men and women of Consecrated Life in the Catholic Church of South Sudan reiterate our full collaboration, in communion with the local Churches and other stakeholders, with the national healing process so that justice, peace and true reconciliation may be established in South Sudan. We will continue to serve the people of this young nation in a spirit of solidarity, joy and with hope for a better future. *“Behold, I make all things new” (Revelation 21:5).*

“Oh, God bless South Sudan!”

**FR. DANIELE MOSCHETTI, MCCJ CHAIRPERSON RSASS,
the EXECUTIVE MEMBERS
and the 75 Representatives of 29 Religious Congregations
working in South Sudan**

Juba, 15 May 2014