

# Message of Hope from the South Sudan Catholic Bishops

Dear Caritas friends,

Please find a statement from the Catholic Bishops of South Sudan on the ongoing conflict in the Republic of South Sudan.

“WAR IS EVIL; WAR CANNOT BRING PEACE; THIS WAR MUST STOP”

Then the Lord said to Cain, ‘Where is your brother Abel?’ He said, ‘I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?’ And the Lord said, ‘What have you done? Listen; your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground!’ (Genesis 4:9-10)

## Preamble

We, the Catholic bishops of South Sudan meeting in Juba from 23rd – 25th September 2014, compelled by the Gospel imperative and having deliberated on the situation of the Church and the people in our country, solemnly declare that the current war in South Sudan is evil, as we have said in previous messages. There is no moral justification for any further killing. We can accept no excuses nor conditions from any party or individual for the continuation of the war. The fighting and killing must stop immediately and unconditionally. Political and other grievances must indeed be addressed, but only when the fighting has stopped. These issues are on the table in Ethiopia and will be addressed in the political process. We declare before God that it is evil for any party to use continuing violence to try to further their political agenda.

## Appreciation

We appreciate the sacrifice of the clergy, religious, catechists and lay people who are facing great danger and hardship in the service of the people during these difficult times.

We thank IGAD (Intergovernmental Authority on Development) for their noble efforts to mediate peace in South Sudan. We also thank the international community and other nations in our own region and encourage them to continue their support.

## The Impact of War

The war has had a huge negative impact on our country. It has once again reinforced the culture of violence with which we have lived for so many decades. It has seriously undermined our standing in the world which so recently welcomed us as the world's newest nation and it has damaged our image. Human rights are still under threat, including freedom of speech.

## Humanitarian Aid and Development

Above all it has created a humanitarian tragedy. Thousands have been killed and hundreds of thousands displaced. Our traumatised population has been re-traumatised by atrocities we have rarely seen before. Displaced people are living in appalling conditions, whether in the

countryside, or in UN camps in the cities, or as refugees in neighbouring countries. A famine is looming in parts of the country. International humanitarian access is limited due to insecurity. Once again we declare this war immoral and we demand an immediate end to all hostilities so that these humanitarian concerns can be addressed.

Development has been brought to a halt. Freezing funds meant for development is an invitation to more insecurity and suffering. It can be said that peace is another word for development. While seven out of ten states are not directly affected by the violence, their people are still suffering and are still in need of development activities. Prevention is better than cure. We call on the international community to continue to support development. We as bishops see coming to the aid of our people, both in government and opposition areas, as our prime responsibility.

### Tribalism

Aware of the negative impact of war, we call attention to the rise in tribalism as a result of the conflict. Traditionally, the peoples of South Sudan do not hate each other. While there have been tribal conflicts over issues such as cattle and land, there have also been traditional mechanisms to resolve those conflicts before they get out of control. Our peoples have inter-married, assisted each other during famines, moved freely around the country, studied together in national boarding schools, lived together in cities, shared their cultural heritage and worked together in many different spheres. We acknowledge the generosity of many who even during the current conflict have welcomed and protected people from other ethnic groups. However ethnicity has now become a negative issue throughout our society. Large-scale ethnic killing has created a cycle of fear, hatred and revenge. Our politics is becoming ethnic, with perceptions from various communities that one tribe or other is favoured, or that one tribe or another is under-represented, or even that one tribe or another “deserves” to rule. Even within our churches, elements of tribalism are creeping in and creating suspicion, hindering our efforts to work for peace and reconciliation. This is not the way forward. We condemn tribalism and repeat our earlier call for “One People from every Tribe, Tongue and Nationality”. We are South Sudanese, and we call for the creation of a national identity which builds on but transcends our tribal roots and heritage.

### Corruption

Tribalism is allied with corruption and nepotism. Political office is perceived by many as synonymous with access to power and wealth, and communities often feel that they need their own tribesmen and women in power in order for that community to have access to resources. We condemn corruption and tribalism. We challenge all our political leaders, whether in government or opposition, and remind them that political leadership is about service to all the citizens of South Sudan, not about personal power and wealth nor favouring one community or other. We urge our people not to fall into the trap of supporting their own tribe rather than seeking the best qualified person for the position.

### Our Call for Peace

We are pastors, not politicians, but our faithful are dying. We do not try to advise on the details of the political resolution of the problems of our country. Nevertheless, we urge the parties to negotiate in good faith; we demand that the killing must stop. No doubt both sides will be required to compromise.

Just as we put our trust in the people during the People to People Peace Process, just as we trusted the people when we advocated for them to have the Right of Self-Determination to choose for themselves the political future of their country in a referendum in 2011, we now believe that the people of our country are capable of determining the political future following the current conflict. In the longer-term process, the citizens of South Sudan must play a prominent role, represented by their traditional leaders, their faith communities, civil society and other actors.

In our Prophetic role as bishops, we state without hesitation or fear that the current conflict is evil and must be stopped immediately and unconditionally, regardless of any other considerations. We call on every political leader, every military officer, every individual soldier, every armed civilian, whether government or opposition, to avoid any further killing. It is immoral and evil. The question to ask ourselves is: do I have the sincere will to renounce violence, to compromise and to bring peace?

The Church is the Mother of all people from every ethnic group in the whole of South Sudan. We call upon all the people to embark on the path of reconciliation, healing and peace. We encourage our priests, religious and pastoral agents, our international partners, and the other churches and faith communities, to intensify their activities around these, to become more active peace-makers. Prayer is the only sure way to peace. Our dioceses and parishes must organise prayers for peace. Repent and do not sin any more!

They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. (Isaiah 2:4)

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With best wishes,

Caritas Internationalis  
Emergency Response Team