

AFRECS E-Blast: January 1, 2014

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A SPECIAL MESSAGE ABOUT THE CRISIS IN SOUTH SUDAN FROM AFRECS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RICHARD PARKINS

Dear Friends,

Since our last message, South Sudan has undergone even greater suffering and displacement. The extent of devastation is beyond comprehension. The situation recalls a previous era in South Sudan when millions were uprooted and several million more perished in a protracted civil war. This repetition of past tragedy is painful for the many who celebrated a couple of years ago the independence of South Sudan with an accompanying hope that a new day had dawned for people whose diet had been one of anguish and grief. We must not give up on the possibility that this hope can, with God's help and our persistent prayers and support, become a reality.

AFRECS has joined other church friends with ties to South Sudan and primarily the Episcopal Church of South Sudan and Sudan in weekly conference calls where we receive information directly from our ECSSS friends. This information is shared with those in our Government who have official roles in addressing the current crisis in South Sudan. We have been grateful for the interest that our USG colleagues have shown in our field reports.

As we look forward from the despair that now surrounds us, one conclusion that seems warranted and which was eloquently expressed in a [recent article by Alex de Wall and Abdul Mohammed](#) in *The Washington Post* that the church must be strengthened in its role as peacemaker.

Their article speaks not only to the urgency of an immediate ceasefire and a coming together of the political leaders to seek an end to the violence, but calls attention to the unfinished business of peacemaking and reconciliation that must be undertaken if South Sudan is to have a future. The authors conclude that independence came at a time when the wounds of past conflict in South Sudan had not healed and where vestiges of past tribal/ethnic conflict were still a part of the psyche of this new nation. While there have been some important preliminary steps taken to launch a nationwide peace and reconciliation initiative, the effort is now in jeopardy as half of the country deals with conflict which in many places expresses itself along tribal/ethnic lines. AFRECS has provided modest support to some of past reconciliation efforts undertaken by the ECS.

An inescapable conclusion is that when peace hopefully returns, at least to a point where the fighting ends and a semblance of normalcy exists, the churches and faith leaders must be given the mandate as well as the resources to undertake robust, sustained, and far-reaching work in peace and reconciliation. This goal should supersede all others with the exception of feeding

starving people and healing the sick and wounded. Resources must include funds to support the extensive and costly travel that must take place in a country as vast as South Sudan where infrastructure is virtually non-existent. It is ironic that in a nation where the presence of the church is so widespread, horrific acts of violence can still occur. This speaks to the imperative that peacemaking be the constant message of churches. Let us advocate that they be equipped to instill this message into the hearts and minds of those who look to the church as a source of moral and spiritual authority. The unfinished business of peace and reconciliation cannot remain unfinished if the larger task of building a unified nation is to occur. In the meantime, let us pray that leaders will cease to seek power at the expense of their people and find a way to restore peace and stability to this war-ravaged nation.

Faithfully,
Richard Parkins

More Information on the Crisis in South Sudan

In addition to the [excellent summary](#) and call for resolution of underlying issues in the *Washington Post* article that Richard cited above, the following resources may also be of interest:

The New York Times published a story today that also delves into the [background tensions](#) underlying the current crisis in South Sudan.

The BBC has posted a 12/31/13 video [interview](#) with President Salva Kiir and a [written summary and update](#) with the same dateline in which they note that former Vice President Riek Machar has agreed to peace talks.

Toby Lanzer, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in South Sudan, has a 12/30/13 [editorial](#) for Al-Jazeera summarizing the situation and urging humanitarian organizations to stay and provide aid.

Eric Reeves has written an [editorial](#) in which he offers an analysis of Riek Machar's goals and motives: "Riek Machar's End Game: What Is It?"

The [latest news](#) as of this evening (1/1/14) in East Africa is that both government and rebel negotiators have arrived in Addis Ababa for peace talks, which may begin tomorrow. On Tuesday the rebels retook Bor or parts of Bor, and according to Riek Machar are marching on Juba. At the same time, the *Sudan Tribune* reported yesterday that, according to the East African Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the two sides agreed to a [ceasefire](#) hours before the deadline imposed by regional leaders.

PRAY FOR PEACE AND DEEP HEALING OF THE CONFLICTS AND RIVALRIES IN SOUTH SUDAN.

PARTNER, URGE, GIVE

If you'd like to be doing more to help address the crisis in South Sudan, please consider the following:

* If you have contacts in South Sudan and are able to get news of various parts of the country and the church from them, keep AFRECS in the loop by replying to this email or using our [main contact email address](#).

* Pay attention to the evolving story and be prepared to advocate for peacemaking with the US (or other) government if attention to conflict resolution wanes.

* Give to provide relief for internally displaced persons and others whose resources are compromised by the fighting and instability. One hundred percent of [donations to AFRECS](#) go to ECSSS entities that can provide direct help to the people most in need.