

AFRECS E-Blast: March 12, 2014

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A Lenten Journey of Hope:

A Message from AFRECS Executive Director, Richard Parkins

Dear Friends,

A week ago Sunday (3/2/14) it was my privilege to give a homily at a Mission Sunday service at Christ Church, Alexandria. As it happened, this was also the Feast of the Transfiguration. The Gospel message for that day provided the occasion for lifting up mission and service as the essence of God's call to us. ([Please refer to the homily on the AFRECS web site](#)). Remember that Jesus did not seek the adulation that Peter and James wanted to confer upon him. Rather he chose a journey into the valley of service where healing, forgiveness and reconciliation happened. I think that when God said 'Listen to Him', he meant for the disciples, and thus his people, to live into his message of forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation.

We are all overwhelmed by the sad news of violence and upheaval that plagues vast areas of South Sudan. Being a resurrection people, however, we cannot allow these tales to be the concluding chapter in our journey with our Sudanese sisters and brothers. As we enter into their suffering, we should 'Listen to Him' and be a source of hope for our war weary friends.

Toward this end, AFRECS, along with friends from the Diocese of Salisbury in the UK, are responding to a plea for help from a number of bishops of the Episcopal Church of South Sudan and Sudan. They reach out to us while their people, often dispersed because of the ravages of war, reach out to them. Maintaining the semblance of a diocese for some has been a daunting challenge. In several dioceses, such as Bor and Malakal, the consequences of conflict have left untold devastation and displacement in its wake. In others such as Renk, the challenge has been to receive thousands of those fleeing violence even when their own resources were severely strained. The hardship of securing food and medicine is overwhelming. We estimate that 10 (of 26) dioceses are in precarious situations, needing help because of the war.

A group of South Sudanese bishops have appealed to us and our colleagues in Salisbury for assistance to maintain the viability of their dioceses, to meet the basic needs of their displaced families, and to continue as a force for peace and reconciliation. We ask you to join with us in this effort by generously responding to our appeal. Please consult our web site to [view the letter of AFRECS president, Bishop](#)

[David Jones](#) which reaches out to our network of supporters and beyond. In addition to your fervent prayers for peace in South Sudan, please consider a contribution to AFRECS to help us extend hope to those church leaders in South Sudan who struggle daily to be a spiritual presence in the lives of their people. If a sustainable peace is to come to South Sudan, a vital church community will be essential to that process. We want to do our part in equipping the leaders of the Church to be the faithful leaders they struggle to be. All donations will go directly to support this effort. The need is urgent. Please respond as generously as possible.

In this holy season, we often take on special tasks or in some way be a bit more intentional in our service to others. You are invited to make prayers for peace in South Sudan and to give support for the Church there as a part of your Lenten discipline.

Faithfully,
Richard Parkins

Note from E-Blast Editor:
The mailing address for AFRECS is:
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You may also make donations on-line via Pay Pal:
<http://www.afreecs.org/getInvolved.htm>

This recent [Situation Report from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs \(UN OCHA\)](#) tells the harrowing story of the results of the violence that began on 15 December. Highlights include:

*The number of people aid agencies have reached across South Sudan since the start of the year (758,4000). About one-third of this total are refugees sheltering in the country.

*The increased number of people who have fled from South Sudan to neighboring countries (226,000).

*An agreement that was signed with the Government to establish a new site for displaced people in Juba. It will hold 10,000 people and help decongest the two UN bases in the capital.

*Response to thousands of displaced people in Unity State began on 6 March. So far, aid agencies have responded in 59 of 129 reported sites with displaced people in South Sudan.

*The situation remains volatile in Jonglei, Unity and Upper Nile states. Fighting occurred on 5 March in Juba, reportedly between elements of the South Sudanese armed forces, but was contained by 6 March.

*The area around Melut in northern Upper Nile State remained a key concern for aid agencies, as both conflict parties continued to mobilize, possibly ahead of further clashes.

To gain a deeper understanding of the current situation, please see this late-breaking article from [Africa Confidential](#) just provided to us by John Ashworth. "Shooting in Juba, talking in Addis" gives a thorough look at all of the different elements that are in play at this time. "Regional governments plan to send in troops as pressure grows for a political settlement" is the subtitle and the first paragraph follows:

"As the African Union discusses sending a stabilisation force to South Sudan, there is a glimmer of hope in Addis Ababa, where a new committee from all sides is due to meet on 7 March to tackle the political differences within the governing Sudan People's Liberation Movement. This is the first time that President **Salva Kiir Mayardit** has accepted that the roots of the crisis lie within the SPLM, rather than in the claims of a coup attempt by his former Vice-President, **Riek Machar Teny Dhurgon**. The new initiative, with **Ethiopia** and **South Africa** as mediators, came on 5 March, the day after the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) talks stalled, though participants had agreed to resume on 20 March."

Here are the final two paragraphs which close the article:

"Many feel that Riek has no place in the 'interim government' now openly talked about. Both Riek and Salva say they would refuse to serve together in government. Yet the Southern culture of forgiveness is deep: 'No one is permanently guilty', said one South Sudanese analyst. Even Riek's return is not impossible.

"Yet Riek would be unacceptable without Salva. Deng Alor and other dissidents want

both men to stand down. They argue for an interim government led by an independent figure who would prepare fresh elections but not stand in them. As war weariness grows, such an arrangement could look increasingly attractive to South Sudanese."

This [press release by the Chollo \(Shilluk\) community](#) in the diaspora is signed by 57 names representing the following countries: USA, Europe, Canada, and Australia. It decries the horrific crimes which have been committed in South Sudan, particularly against members of their community. Also, it appeals to the UN Security Council and the African Union to hold those responsible to account for these crimes.

[Follow this link](#) to read an eye witness account of the destruction of Malakal, once a city of 250,000 inhabitants. 'We were the last three Comboni Sisters left,' writes Sister Elena Balatti, a missionary to the Fides Agency. "...(W)e too have abandoned Malakal with the last group of people, because there was no reason to stay in a deserted city."

As reported recently in the [Sudan Tribune](#), the leader of a South Sudanese charity has written an open letter urging the country's ex-vice president, Riek Machar to "rein" his forces from destroying and looting schools and health facilities in Jonglei's Duk County.

John Dau, one of the South Sudanese 'lost boys', appealed to Machar's "true leadership and desire for the best for the people of South Sudan." The Foundation clinic, orphanage and all the other schools in Duk "were not built by Kiir's Government but by the citizens of Duk County with unwavering support from warm-hearted Americans and Europeans who care so much and wanted to mitigate suffering of all our people."

"Someone has to be the true humanitarian in this conflict," Dau continued in his open letter to Machar. "If the Government is not showing a sense of maturity in your opinion...why can't you take that role of being an adult who cares about people's lives and avoids despicable and pointless destruction?"

Dau, an award winning human rights activist, called on Machar to "stop the war immediately to avoid more lives being lost."

It is not too late to engage in '[Concord: for peace & reconciliation](#)' the Lenten Study published by the Diocese of Wau in South Sudan. The dialogue generated by this well-thought out program promises to be enriching for all who participate, especially during this tumultuous time. (Ellen J. Hanckel)

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: info@afrecs.org.
- * Pay attention to the evolving events and be prepared to advocate for peacemaking with the US (or other) government, especially 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 ECSS&S entities that can provide direct help to the people most in need.

If you have received this eblast in a forwarded message, you may [sign up here](#) to subscribe. Then you will receive them from AFRECS on a regular bi-weekly schedule.