

AFRECS E-Blast: May 21, 2014

PRAY. TEACH. PARTNER. URGE. GIVE.

Message from AFRECS Executive Director, Richard Parkins

WHAT LIES AHEAD

Hoping and praying that a genuine cease fire will prevail, it is not too soon to ponder what lies ahead for South Sudan and the Church. The agenda which follows will include compelling issues such as governance, peace and reconciliation, and rebuilding. We shall continue our journey with our Sudanese friends as they face these daunting tasks.

We have spoken often of the healing and reconciliation that must start even as the embers of conflict smolder. If the conflict continues, the wounds of war will deepen and the animosities which were kindled by the war will fester. The fragile trust that may have existed among tribes will be harder to re-establish. Most South Sudanese will be able to cite new suffering that will inhibit their ability to embrace neighbors of a different group. There will be greater demands for accountability and possibly less optimism about South Sudan's future as a unified nation. The million or so displaced will have their own accounts to relay even as we hear of atrocities in camps of women being raped and children being abused. Clearly if the church is to be the major purveyor of peace and reconciliation, there is an even greater need for our prayers as well as our resources to give them the skill, the courage and the perseverance to wear the cloak of peace maker and healer. Fortunately, the church is grappling with possible strategies to go forward on this front when South Sudan is secure enough to begin the process. These efforts must be commended and supported.

Governance issues dominate conversations about South Sudan's future. The road forward is not clear. Most agree that simply continuing with the current administration without addressing the governance issues that contributed to the conflict would be foolish. We have heard church leaders and civil society spokespersons cite the indifference and remoteness of the Government to the people whom they are supposed to serve. Failure to address this concern could well plant the seeds of another conflict.

Postponing the elections which were to occur in 2015 makes sense if interim arrangements are agreed upon which would allow the country to heal sufficiently to undertake a fair and honest election. Some suggest that a government of technocrats with robust international oversight and monitoring might be one option. Others have spoken of a coalition government with the caveat that it was a kind of coalition government whose failure is being acted out in the violence that now plagues the country. Again the church will be challenged to encourage forbearance and patience upon the part of South Sudanese as they struggle through a transition.

The rebuilding of those war ravaged parts of South Sudan is a task that will require vast financial support that may not be readily forthcoming unless donors, both public and private, believe that what lies ahead is a stable and secure nation. But without rebuilding, the people will remain distrustful of any political agenda and be vulnerable to whatever negative forces linger in South Sudan.

Those of us who have partnered with our friends of the churches of South Sudan will be asked to do more and to help the faithful to lead the way as South Sudan goes into a serious recovery mode.

In addition to the church leaders whose perseverance and dedication to their people continue to inspire us, there are civil society leaders with the wisdom and compassion that if mobilized and lifted up can give South Sudan the leadership that will help new things to happen in their country. Last week several of us heard three

spokespersons of South Sudan's civil society that reflected these qualities. (You may access this archived webcast at this [U. S. Institute of Peace link.](#)) If mobilized and promoted as leaders, they and others like them could offer the kind of leadership that could make a positive difference as South Sudan recaptures its place as a promising new nation. Let us pray that such leadership and that of faith communities will ascend to greater prominence as South Sudan and its friends seek a way forward.

Faithfully,
Richard Parkins

The [Sudan Tribune](#) recently published an article about the on-going crisis in Darfur. Written by Eric Reeves, it is well documented. "Refusing to see Darfur's agony," is the title and the subtitle, "Myopic and lazy reporting, political expediency have left millions to suffer and die invisibly" gives insight from the author's point of view. The first paragraph reads in part:

May 17, 2014 - While the news media in most of the world focus with relentless obsession on some three hundred girls kidnapped in Nigeria by the barbaric Boko Haram, stories of much greater human magnitude continue to unfold without so much as a glancing notice. It is hard not to feel the pain of these girls and their families; but it is dwarfed by the plight of so many girls, in so many places around the world....(In Darfur)...many tens of thousands of girls have been killed during what has become a grim genocide by attrition, now entering its second decade with almost complete invisibility. It is almost certain that tens of thousands of girls, many very young, have been raped—some brutally, even fatally gang-raped. These outrageously cruel assaults often occur in front of families in order to magnify the social stigma attached to rape. Thousands of non-Arab or African girls and women have been abducted to become sexual slaves of Arab militia groups, sometimes for extended periods of time.

The article concludes with this final paragraph:

Perhaps this is a moment in which news organizations might feel compelled to reflect on their journalistic choices. They may continue to report as they have, driven by what seem the "sexiest," most audience-drawing, most accessible stories of human tragedy. Or some may see that the obsession with Malaysian Flight 370 and the Boko Haram kidnappings permits consumers with a prurient love of spectacle to drive news content, indeed to define "news." Perhaps, just perhaps this may be a catalyst for re-committing to reporting news that is most consequential, in the broadest terms, for well-informed citizens of the world. At present, however, such commitment is nowhere in sight, so for Darfur at least we must rely on Radio Dabanga.

Also on May 17, [The New York Times](#) posted this Sunday Review/Editorial with the by-line of 'The Editorial Board'. Under the title, "South Sudan in Peril", it paints the grim picture of reality in the youngest nation in the world. In the opening paragraphs it reads:

Transforming South Sudan into a viable state after it declared independence from Sudan in 2011 was always going to be a huge challenge. President Salva Kiir and rebel commander Riek Machar have made that task vastly more difficult. Since war broke out in December, these political rivals and their armed followers have turned the country into a killing field, [slaughtering thousands](#) of South Sudanese, imperiling thousands more and destroying hopes for a stable future.

In conclusion, it reads:

An intervention by (Secretary of State John) Kerry and (United Nations secretary general) Ban Ki-moon in the last few weeks resulted in Mr. Kiir, a member of the Dinka tribe, and Mr. Machar, his former vice president and a member of the Nuer tribe, signing a cease-fire deal and agreeing to allow access for humanitarian deliveries. But the cease-fire began to fall apart almost immediately, raising doubts that the two sides would follow through with a pledge to hold further talks on forming an interim government. The United Nations Security Council should move quickly to strengthen and expand the [peacekeeping mission](#) in South Sudan.

No foreign nation has worked harder for South Sudan's independence than the United States. After the war began and the two sides resisted appeals to end the bloodshed, the Obama administration froze United States-based assets owned by allies of the two leaders. Washington should increase the pressure by adding more names to that sanctions list.

While Mr. Kiir and Mr. Machar subject millions of innocent civilians to killing and chaos, experts say their families and assets are safely out of the way in neighboring countries.

On May 20, the [Department of State](#) announced an additional pledge of \$300 million by the United States "in humanitarian assistance to help the people of South Sudan who have been placed at risk by the conflict that began last December." The additional funding was announced at the Humanitarian Pledging Conference for South Sudan in Oslo, Norway where the U.S. joined more than 40 other countries in pledging support to help those displaced inside the country, as well as those who have fled to neighboring countries.

The announcement concluded by stating that the total amount of "U.S. humanitarian assistance to South Sudan in fiscal year 2014 is more than \$434 million," making it the leading single donor of humanitarian assistance to the country. "However, this aid can only be effective if the Government of South Sudan, opposition forces, and all other conflict parties stop fighting and remove obstacles to the delivery of life-saving assistance. It is crucial that both sides implement their May 9 agreement to end the violence and allow immediate, full and unconditional access for the United Nations and humanitarian organizations to reach those in need.

In closing this edition of the E-Blast, here is a link to a [Human Rights Watch article](#) that tells the story of "Rape and War in South Sudan" written from the point of view of Skye Wheeler, a researcher for Sudan and South Sudan on the Africa Division of Human Rights Watch.

She opens the article with these first two paragraphs:

"It's like nothing before," one woman, who saw her sister-in-law gang raped, told us. She is just one of many women who have said they had been raped - or witnessed rape - as they fled an area of South Sudan where government forces and their proxy Darfuri rebel group had [burned and pillaged villages](#) and attacked civilians.

South Sudan's conflict has been dominated not so much by fierce battles between government and opposition forces, as by brutal attacks on civilians, often because of their ethnicity. Starting with round-ups and a massacre of ethnic Nuer in Juba, the conflict has spiraled into a series of revenge and counter-attacks

on ethnic Dinka, Nuer, and other communities, plunging the country into a human rights and humanitarian crisis. As [donors meet](#) on May 20 to try to address needs and avoid further catastrophe, they should also ensure funding is directed to address an under-acknowledged dimension of the conflict: rape and sexual violence.

And her article ends with this paragraph:

Displacement has brought suffering of many kinds to South Sudan's women and girls, and sexual assault only adds to their torment. Funders have an opportunity to ensure support for services for the survivors of these attacks in locations such as the UN bases. They should take this opportunity also to try to reduce the stigma of rape and the abusive power of men with guns over South Sudanese women and girls.

Finally, follow this link to the key messages document made available to the [Emergency Directors Group](#) before the above-cited conference in Oslo, Norway.

Thank you to our readers for your interest, your prayers, and your support.
Ellen J. Hanckel
Editor

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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.