

AFRECS E-Blast: July 22, 2015

PRAY. TEACH. PARTNER. URGE. GIVE.

Message from AFRECS Executive Director, Richard Parkins

Forgiveness - A Major Challenge

Dear Friends,

One of the **devastating consequences** of the protracted violence and suffering afflicting South Sudan are the mounting numbers of people who will experience a profound **sense of revenge**. As human rights violations of the most extreme form escalate and war dominates the landscape of many parts of South Sudan, thousands more will be carrying with them the **wounds of war**. Moreover, the depth of their wounds will be such that it will take unimaginable effort by **those dispensing healing and fostering reconciliation** to bring about the recovery that will be sorely needed if South Sudan is to move forward. **Yet, the process must begin** even as we await a cessation of hostilities.

One of the most precious and special aspects of our Christian heritage is an **understanding of forgiveness as the core** of who we are as followers of Jesus Christ. Christ makes clear that our willingness to forgive should be boundless. In forgiving those who have wronged us, we show that we have truly incarnated the message of the cross. Translating this message for those whose pain is so acute is the challenge facing those faith communities who accept the charge to be a source of healing and reconciliation. **An ability to forgive is key to a ministry of peace making**. It is this essential message that the churches are uniquely equipped to convey. Inculcating a willingness to forgive in the face of countless atrocities becomes an imperative for those reaching out to the victims of this horrific conflict.

A precursor to any attempt at reconciliation between warring factions is **facing the trauma** that comes from the wounds that war has inflicted. Many have insisted, rightfully so, that unless we can contribute to the healing of both victim and perpetrator, efforts at peace making and reconciliation will be frustrated. **Helping persons to forgive and to receive forgiveness from others is a part of the healing process**.

If we were to seek a remedy to a health related epidemic, we would equip local communities with clinics and medical practitioners to apply their skills and tools on an urgent basis so that the illness at hand would be contained and eliminated. Does not the pervasive anger and sense of revenge that is likely to engulf much of South Sudan worthy of an equally urgent response? It is encouraging to know that **peace making initiatives are occurring in parts of South Sudan**. Church leaders have visited Rwanda as a way of informing themselves of how faith communities worked to recover from its genocidal blood bath.

At a recent meeting of faith based groups we learned of various attempts being made to start the peace making process. These efforts are reminders of a counter message which must ultimately overcome the message of tribalism, power seeking, and revenge that would otherwise have the upper hand. We know that the Justice, Peace, and Reconciliation Commission seeks to take its peace making efforts to Bor where some of the most egregious violence of the recent conflict has occurred. **Those undertaking this**

work will need our prayers as they faithfully and courageously try to bring healing to those whose wounds are deep and many.

Faithfully,

Richard Parkins

AFRECS will not post eblasts during August. They will resume in September. Meanwhile, please pray for our Friends in South Sudan and Sudan.

Please pray for peace,

Ellen J. Hanckel

Editor, AFRECS E-Blast

Mark your calendars

In October, we will gather in the Washington D.C. area for our annual conference. This year we will pay particular attention to the establishment and maintenance of partnerships as well as providing up to date information about the ongoing crisis in the South. **Please mark your calendars for Friday and Saturday, October 23 and 24, 2015.**

More details will follow.

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South Sudan

After the eblast was prepared, the editor received [this late-breaking news from Human Rights Watch](#) documenting the horrible atrocities that occurred in Unity state beginning in April. For several months, government forces and allied troops destroyed villages and killed many civilians in the most gruesome way. The report, although it is sickening, cannot be ignored by anyone following the events in this region. We must be aware of what is happening and join with others to put a stop to it.

The Enough Project joined a diverse community of 19 advocacy, faith and human rights organizations issuing an [open letter to President Obama](#) as he embarks upon his historic trip to Kenya and Ethiopia. The letter urges the President to take a number of specific steps to help combat the culture of impunity to forge an enabling environment for peace negotiations. You can advocate through the Enough Project

website to [urge President Obama to use his trip to Africa to support an end to the culture of impunity in South Sudan](#).

[Voice of America](#) updates the report from the Intergovernmental Authority on Development. "IGAD Sets Deadline for Final South Sudan Peace Deal" reads the headline. A brief excerpt follows:

"The East African bloc IGAD, which has been trying for 18 months to restore peace in South Sudan, said this week that a final peace deal for the young nation will be signed on Aug. 17. An agenda sent out this week by IGAD indicates that peace talks for South Sudan will resume at the beginning of August, after South Sudanese negotiators have consulted with their leaders about a compromise agreement for South Sudan that IGAD has put together."

[Indiablooms](#) posts this article: "South Sudan: UN official cites will of the people to achieve peace despite 'bleak' situation".

"It is important for us to use this time now to make this phrase a reality," the Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for South Sudan, Moustapha Soumaré, told a press conference in Juba, where he also decried continuing fighting that had resulted in increased numbers of internally displaced persons. Speaking to reporters, he said he had repeatedly heard in different meetings, at all levels, and during extensive travels in the different states of the country, since he arrived four months ago, the phrase "we want peace now". Noting concerns that warring parties were yet to sign a peace agreement, he noted some recent positive steps, including the return of some former political detainees and continuing efforts by the international community to support peace negotiations.

"The message is how we can move forward, as the President Salva Kiir said in his speech during independence celebrations," he stressed. "We hope that the next step will come soon." Soumaré also emphasized that the crisis could only be solved by South Sudanese themselves, although the international community would continue to provide support.

"It is clear that the humanitarian situation is still dire," he said. The more fighting there is, the more displacement. For that to stop, the fighting has to stop and there has to be a peace accord."

[Radio Tamazuji](#) recently posted this opinion piece: "South Sudan peace deal an unlikely prospect". Written by the head of the department of peace and reconciliation of SPLM-IO Youth League Chapter in Egypt, the author argues that "...members of President Salva Kiir's coalition may prevent him from signing peace with the rebels."

A [feature article in the Sudan Tribune](#) details drought conditions in Jonglei State that are impacting agro businesses there.

"About 51 organised farmers who invested in agro-business in Jonglei state capital of Bor, producing vegetable, maize for sale, have been severely affected by drought this year and appealed for intervention from relief organizations. The group had been operational for three years now, composed of 18 men, majority of whom retired from the army, and some men who returned from Sudan after South Sudan seceded in 2011. 33 other members were women of various ages, majority of them widows of the 21 year old civil war between Sudan and the then southern Sudan former rebels led by late John Garang de Mabior."

"Abraham Mayom Lual said among the farmers were very old men and women, who could not irrigate their farms, urging NGOs like OXFARM to support them with at least two generators for irrigation. "These old men and women cannot irrigate their farms by carrying water cans. We have one generator that is not enough for all of us. If OXFARM turns up to provide us with more generators for irrigation, we would be the leading suppliers of fresh vegetable in this market," said Mayom. These farmers had used lands allotted to former detainees including Gier Chuang Aluong, Rebecca Nyandeng Garang, and others in Bor to generate their livelihood."

The [Sudan Tribune](#) recently posted this article: "South Sudan overturns expulsion of top UN official in Unity state".

"South Sudanese minister of foreign affairs and international cooperation, Barnaba Marial Benjamin, has confirmed on Saturday that the national government had overturned the decision of Unity state government whose cabinet last week passed a resolution expelling the head of the United Nations mission in the area." The decision was made in protest of her "report on atrocities committed by president Salva Kiir's government in the area." ... "That issue has been resolved and the person... is already in Unity state. I am told she has gone to Unity state," the minister said on Saturday."

"Meanwhile the deputy special representative of the secretary general of the United Nations for political affairs, Moustapha Soumare, confirmed the revocation of the expulsion and the affected official had returned to Unity state after high level contacts were made with both state and the national government. "I want to say that the decision has been revoked. The State Coordinator, Mary Cummins, is now in Unity State. I really want to thank the Government at the national level with whom we have had long engagement to discuss the issue," Soumare told reporters at press briefing on Thursday in Juba."

Both South Sudan & Sudan

Two South Sudanese Pastors are being held in jail without access to their lawyer. Urgent action is needed to petition for the detained pastors to have access to legal counsel. They are currently being held in solitary confinement and are at risk of flogging and the death penalty if convicted.

Reverend Yat Michael (49 years old) and **Reverend Peter Yen** (36 years old), both South Sudanese pastors, were transferred to Kober Prison in Khartoum, a maximum security facility, on 4 June after which their families and lawyer were not allowed to visit them. The Prison Directorate that is granted sole discretion under the law to allow visitation has rejected requests for visits. Their lawyer challenged this in court on 8 June, but his appeal was denied. He plans to appeal against the prison authorities on the grounds that it is unconstitutional to deny him access to his clients. The lawyer was only allowed to meet the two South Sudanese pastors for 10-15 minutes during a court session on 2 July where the court ruled that there was sufficient evidence to warrant the defense's response. He protested that this was insufficient time to prepare a defense for his clients who are facing the death penalty. Amnesty International believes that the trial against Reverend Yat Michael and Reverend Peter Yen is related to the exercise of their freedom of religion and thus considers them prisoners of conscience. They have now spent almost seven months in detention since their arrests on 21 December and 11 January respectively.

Amnesty International has documented several cases of individuals being persecuted due to their religious affiliation in Sudan as well as several cases of people sentenced to flogging in Sudan. For example, in August 2013, Meriam Yahya Ibrahim was convicted and sentenced to death on charges of adultery and apostasy. She was detained in prison along with her son and gave birth to her daughter in Omdurman prison while in shackles. She was released on 23 June 2014 when her sentence was reversed by an appeals court and due to international outcry.

Instructions on how to contact the appropriate authorities are given by following this [link to the Amnesty International website](#) where the document is posted.

This case is also being followed closely by the [American Center for Law & Justice](#), the "politically conservative, Christian-based social activism organization... headquartered in Washington, D.C." (quotation from their website)

The following is a brief excerpt from this recent article which also gives an opportunity to sign an urgent letter to Sudan's Minister of Justice.

"The trial continued earlier this week for Pastors Michael and Peter, who face [trumped-up charges](#) in Sudan that could lead to death sentences. They have committed no crimes. No credible evidence has been offered for their alleged offenses. Rather, they are on trial because as Christians from South Sudan, they visited their Christian brothers and sisters in Sudan and they spoke out against the persecution Christians endure in Sudan. ... The trial will continue with closing arguments on July 23, 2015, and a decision is expected for August 5, 2015."

On another topic, the [Sudan Tribune](#) reports: "Sudan, South Sudan to discuss implementation of cooperation agreements in August." A brief excerpt follows:

"Foreign ministers from Sudan and South Sudan will meet next August in Khartoum to discuss issues related to the implementation of the cooperation agreements between the two countries. Ibrahim Ghandour told reporters Friday that he was recently in Juba to represent president Omer al-Bashir at the celebrations to mark 4th anniversary of South Sudan's independence. He further said he held a meeting with his counterpart Barnaba Marial Benjamin and agreed to discuss in early August the follow-up of the bilateral agreements signed by the two presidents. The foreign ministers co-chair a mechanism agreed by the two countries to supervise the different committees tasked with the implementation of cooperation agreements of September 2012, which covered oil, citizenship rights, security issues, banking, border trade among others."

The [Sudan Tribune](#) also reports that, "South Sudanese president writes to Sudanese counterpart over bilateral relations."

"In a letter to his Sudanese counterpart, South Sudanese president Salva Kiir reiterated his commitment to work for the improvement of bilateral relations and to clear the current differences between the two countries."

Sudan & Region

The [New York Times](#) recently carried this Letter to the Editor: "Time to Act on Sudan". Kath Jones, a reader from New York, writes regarding "[The Worst Atrocity You've Never Heard Of](#)," by Adam B. Ellick and Nicholas Kristof (video, [nytimes.com](#), July 13).

"Where is the action of all the people, politicians and groups around the world that proclaim "never again" when speaking of the horrors of the Holocaust? Their efforts should be in Sudan. What is the point in recalling the atrocities of the past if not to stop atrocities like these? All the films, all the books, all the talk of the Holocaust and how people stood by and let it happen ... and still this is happening, right under the noses of all who denounce the past. How is it possible that with so many saying "never again," this suffering and persecution are taking place? Where are our priorities: Shall we build another museum to remember genocide while doing nothing to stop this?"

[Christian Today](#), the UK's largest online Christian news provider, reports that "Two of the 12 women arrested when leaving church in Sudan on suspicion of committing "public indecency" for violating the dress code have been found guilty and fined. "... "The women were part of a group of Christian women from the Nuba Mountains who were [arrested on 25 June](#), after leaving a celebration service at the El Izba Baptist Church in Khartoum, Sudan. They were tried separately by the public order court. Ms Eltoun's initial trial hearing was held on 6 July. Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), which has been monitoring the case, reported that her legal team presented two witnesses. A church minister testified that she had not violated Christian dress codes and a Sudanese woman testified that she had not violated Sudanese culture. The judge made no ruling on the initial charge but laid another charge against her based on what she had worn to court and fined her 500 Sudanese Pounds, equivalent to £54. When Ms Eltoun appeared in court on 13 July for a ruling on her original charge, the judge refused to allow her lawyer, Mohaned Mustafa, to remain in court to defend her."

The [Egyptian State Information Service \(SIS\)](#) issued a press release that announced Sudan would host on Wednesday a new round of talks by the experts committee on the Ethiopian renaissance dam. "The talks will be attended by Egyptian, Sudanese and Ethiopian irrigation ministers as well as representatives of the two international consultancy offices that were entrusted to outline a technical study on the dam... (T)he talks aim at settling pending technical points that were not handled in the previous round of talks. The Egyptian experts are fully prepared for the new round of the technical talks in Khartoum, the Egyptian minister asserted. "

Thank you to our readers for your interest, your prayers, and your support.

We invite you to visit our [Website: http://www.afrecs.org/](http://www.afrecs.org/)

Ellen J. Hanckel

Editor

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

*Pray for peace and deep healing of the conflicts and rivalries in South Sudan.

*Join AFRECS or renew your annual membership on line at <http://www.afrecs.org/getInvolved.htm>

* 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.

* Be prepared to advocate for peacemaking with the US (or other) government, especially if attention to conflict resolution wanes.

* [Donate](#) to support the Episcopal Church in South Sudan and Sudan's efforts to provide solace and encourage reconciliation.

*Urge others to support [AFRECS](#) as well.
