A Call to Faithful Action: Diaspora Peacebuilding in South Sudan
Remarks to the South Sudan Diaspora Network for Reconciliation & Peace
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• We meet this week-end at an exciting time for political change around the world. A Sovereign Council, majority civilian, is governing Sudan. In Algeria a long-time autocratic leader has been pushed out. Millions have been demonstrating in Hong Kong. Hundreds of thousands in Moscow. For the last decade scholars and commentators have been talking about a democratic recession around the world. They have been saying that the democratic advances of the late 20th century are over — finished. 2019, however, is showing exciting signs of democratic revival. Could South Sudan be a participant in this revival?
• South Sudan seems to be at a very important juncture. The transition period for unity government under the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan has been extended, some progress has been made since May, but the extension ends in November, only a short time away. I want us to think about whether faith-based peacebuilding can play an important positive role in consolidating peace and reconciliation there.
• In this exciting and critical time, how might the South Sudan Diaspora become a more constructive force in the push for peace and democracy?

USIP Report
• In June the US Institute of Peace in Washington DC published The Religious Landscape in South Sudan: Challenges and Opportunities for Engagement, a project led by our good friend, Jacki Wilson, who has contributed importantly to this conference. The report, available on the USIP website, is worth careful study. It summarizes the result of interviews with 100 key informants in South Sudan representing the entire range of ethnic groups, geographic origins, ages and education, and religious practice. It makes a number of key points:

• The first: “South Sudan is a country and society infused with religion.” Churches and mosques are found in almost every village and town. Moreover, 80% of those interviewed said that when they have a serious problem and need guidance, they go first to religious leaders.” So religious leaders have a lot of influence in South Sudan.

• Second, the Report concluded that religious leaders and other religious actors are considered by South Sudanese to be “the most important peace actors.” There is vital history behind that belief. The 1973 Addis Ababa agreement, which brought 10 years of peace to South Sudan after the first civil war, was brokered by the African Council of Churches. And 20 years ago it was Southern religious leaders who convened Dinka and

Nuer chiefs for conversations about peace. That led to the Wunlit Peace Agreement of 1998 and 15 years of relative peace between those two groups. So South Sudan religious leaders have legitimacy to carry out the hard work of peace. Just as important, the South Sudanese people have clear expectations that they will perform effectively the work of reconciliation and peacebuilding.

• The third point is that although religious actors are busy doing that work, particularly at the local level, there is a problem. They are busy with prayers, sermons, public statements, radio broadcasts, and local peace work, but the Report states that "religious actors … have struggled to translate their legitimacy and influence into broader peace," especially "linking local peace successes with national peace negotiations." To be a little more blunt, they are not using their legitimacy effectively to move violence and war to national peace and reconciliation. That is a serious criticism. Why is that the case and what can be done to make their national peacebuilding more effective?

• One obvious reason for limited effectiveness is that being a religious advocate for peace is dangerous. Between 2013 and 2017 40 religious leaders were killed, of whom 30 were Episcopal priests. That is scary! That is a very high death toll! Many of those who spoke to Jacki Wilson's staff for the study claimed that the Government is targeting religious leaders — sending agents to listen to their sermons, compiling a list of government critics, and sometimes kidnapping and murdering them. Often government representatives accuse religious leaders of "getting political." They argue that their statements reflect political bias against the government. Of course, even when political bias is present, there is no justification for violence against religious actors or anyone else. However, it is true that religious actors are much more likely to be effective in their advocacy if they are not perceived to show political bias. Their congregations, in fact, want them to avoid "getting political."

• There is another reason for the limited effectiveness of Sudanese religious activists. The USIP report states that "religious actors have indicated interest in learning about nonviolent action …, but they do not understand very well the concept of strategic nonviolence."

Prospects for Faith-Inspired Peacebuilding

What does appropriate faith-based peacebuilding look like in South Sudan in late 2019?

• Trauma Healing. It has been said that all South Sudanese have been traumatized by events since 2013, if not before. Without healing, reconciliation and lasting peace are very unlikely. Traumatized people feel humiliated. They are filled with rage. They find it hard to work together. So peacebuilding begins with trauma healing, and other aspects of peacebuilding must be imbedded in trauma healing.

• Many trauma mitigation workshops have been undertaken in South Sudan. Most of the workshops spread over 3-4 days, providing participants an opportunity to tell their stories. That helps them to identify with each other's experience of suffering and to build bridges across ethnic and other divisions.
• Initially these trauma mitigation sessions were sponsored by the UN Development Program or donors like USAID. A number of explicitly faith based programs have also emerged. The Presbyterian Church of South Sudan has trained pastors and lay leaders in trauma healing with the support of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. World Vision has worked with Solidarity with South Sudan, a Catholic network, in the Protection of Civilians camp near Juba to train church and community leaders and teachers. The Education for Peace Foundation, an Episcopal NGO based in Mundri, has done innovative four-day workshops in an area of Equatoria where the IO has been present. It is essential to continue this important faith-based trauma healing work.

• Local Peacebuilding. A lot of good faith-inspired peacebuilding has been going on at the local level. For example, in 2018 Peter Tibi, a Presbyterian pastor, brought together five conflicting Dinka clans in Duony County, Gok State. They signed a peace agreement and set up a committee to follow up. Former Catholic Bishop Paride Taban continues to do important work at his Holy Trinity Peace Village in Kuron, Eastern Equatoria. The Peace Village has been combatting the cattle raiding which has spurred inter-tribal violence among the Murle, the Toposa, the Kachip, and the Jie (Gee uh). Episcopal Bishop Joseph Atem Garang in Renk has been training youth in small business to draw them away from militia action in northern Upper Nile. These are many other examples. Local peacebuilding is critical to successful reconciliation in South Sudan.

• Advocacy and "Getting Political". Advocacy is an essential part of peacebuilding. Peacebuilders must find ways to oppose injustice, and violence and war. They must communicate to those in power about such evils. If you are advocating for peace in South Sudan or elsewhere, it is rather difficult to avoid speaking about politics. Politics is about power, and civil war and violence represent efforts to impose the authority — the power — of one group and its leaders over another group. The failure of the politicians to resolve their political disagreements is what led to civil war in the first place. And the respondents in the USIP study were very clear. They don't want politics in the church, but they do expect religious leaders to "speak truth to power." How do you communicate about politics effectively and not "get political" — meaning not showing political bias for one side against the other?
• A brilliant example of effective advocacy occurred in the making of the historic meeting of the Pope with Salva Kiir and Riek Machar April 11. The Episcopal Primate, Archbishop Justin Badi Arama, who is with us this evening, contacted the Bishop of Canterbury and urged him

to communicate with Pope Francis about encouraging the leaders to make peace. That advocacy led to the dramatic meeting at the Vatican when the Pope kissed their shoes while imploring them to commit to forming a unity government. He did so in the presence of the Archbishop of Canterbury and South Sudan church leaders like Archbishop Justin Badi.

• A very important focus of advocacy should be clear, vociferous and resolute opposition to hate speech. One study concluded that "the majority of South Sudanese Facebook users at the height of the violence chose to describe the crisis as being based on ethnicity more than competition over political power." It added that many Facebook users spread false information among communities, which had the effect of creating fear and panic, and may have led to violence. Friends, Jesus strongly opposed hate speech. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, "Everyone who is angry with their brother or sister [their neighbor] will be in danger of judgment. If they say to them 'You idiot,' they will be in danger of being condemned …. And if they say 'You fool,' they will be in danger of fiery hell." (Mt 5:22 CEB). That is our Biblical guidance on hate speech.

• Public advocacy is risky in South Sudan, but faithful spokespersons can reduce the risk. Statements representing several denominations or churches are less provocative than statements by individuals. Such statements should avoid naming individuals; naming names tends to provoke personal enmity and individual retaliation. Charges of political bias can be mitigated by citing critical official reports of government misconduct, for example, reports from the UN, or the African Union or IGAD. Public criticism can also refer to well-accepted international standards like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 4th Geneva Convention, which protects civilians from murder, torture, and hostage taking.

• Nonviolent Action. Before we talk about approaches to nonviolence in South Sudan, let's review how nonviolent direct action for peace has reemerged in 2019 as a major movement for peaceful political change. There are signs all over the world.

• Look more closely at Sudan. The popular uprising erupted in late 2018 over the reduction of a wheat subsidy. It started in Nubia and spread to Port Sudan, Dongola, Gedaref, Sennar and, of course, Khartoum. It was launched by professional people, under the banner of the Sudan Professionals Association. They were fed up with rising costs of living and the rampant corruption of the Bashir government. It drew into the emergent Force for Freedom and Change students, union members, women, and religious minorities, including Christians. One of its leaders is a taxi driver, another a teacher. The most dramatic photograph of the uprising was the young woman in a thobe, Alaa Sa lah', who stood on top of a vehicle April 8 and led the crowd in chants of "T(h)owra" — revolution. By the time she appeared, the objectives of protest had long since shifted from economic demands to the

ousting of Bashir. And indeed a few days later Bashir was put under house arrest and then deposited in Kobar Prison. However, the demonstrations continued because there was widespread distrust of the Military Council, which made clear it would not turn Bashir over to the International Criminal Court but would try him locally where it could control the proceedings. On June 3 the Rapid Support Forces brutally attacked the demonstrators, killing more than 100 and raping more than 70 women. That shocking brutality did not stop the protesters, who demonstrated remarkable courage and persistence. Their continued defiance spurred the negotiations which led to the agreement signed August 17.

• In Algeria hundreds of thousands have been demonstrating in different cities since April. The demonstrations have been entirely peaceful. Major demonstrations are held on Friday after prayers and on Tuesday by students and youth. The military committee has been trying to schedule elections but the candidates so far mentioned for the presidency are associated with the old regime, and the streets are refusing to accept those potential candidates. Meanwhile the military has been arresting "entrepreneurs" who made a lot of money during the Bouteflika years. The outcome is uncertain, but the power of the people has been demonstrated.

• Then there is Hong Kong. 1.7 million people demonstrated in Hong Kong August 18 and 2 million on June 16. The proposed law permitting extradition of alleged criminals to the mainland has been suspended, but the protesters are demanding it be withdrawn and that Hong Kongers be able to choose their own leaders. Peaceful protests have been accompanied in some places by violence against police and police retaliation.

• Tens of thousands turned out in Moscow every week-end for a month to protest the barring of opposition candidates from contesting municipal elections.

• Months of protest in Venezuela backing opposition leader Juan Guaidó appeared to have bogged down because of fierce repression and failure of the military to defect from Nicolas Maduro. However, both sides have continued negotiations in Barbados, as the economic situation in Venezuela becomes ever more desperate. Some kind of major change seems inevitable.

• So it's a mixed picture, but what is exciting and encouraging is that people of all walks of life, prosperous and poor, well-educated and illiterate, young and old, have taken to the streets in the face of violent repression. These protests have forced a transition in a couple of places. In others there has not yet been a resolution. There is no guarantee of success. But you can bet that the authorities in Juba are worried about the successful popular uprising against a militarized government in Khartoum. They are asking themselves, "Could it happen here, particularly if the Revitalized Agreement is not implemented in a way that improves the lives of the people?"

• In fact, the best research demonstrates that nonviolent civil resistance is far more

successful in creating broad-based change than violent resistance. In a landmark book Why Resistance Works, Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan have shown that nonviolent direct action is much more likely to be successful than violent opposition. Moreover, successful nonviolent resistance movements usher in more durable and internally peaceful democracies, which are less likely to regress into civil war. The authors argue convincingly that violent insurgency is rarely justifiable on strategic grounds. And that, my friends, is confirmation that faith-based nonviolent action, developed and practiced by Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, is highly relevant to achieving the just society we all want for South Sudan. There is much to learn from the panoply of protest taking place around the world.

• You remember that the USIP report said South Sudan religious leaders don't understand strategic non-violence. Friends, there is work to be done to educate them. The Diaspora can assist in that regard.

• Let's see if we can put together the outlines of a course on faith-based nonviolent direct action?
• It would begin with the Old Testament. The first recorded nonviolent resistance came when the Hebrew midwives refused Pharoah's orders to kill the Israelite baby boys (Ex. 1:17). They made up a clever excuse; the Hebrew women go through labor so fast that the midwives don't get there in time. The Old Testament prophets spoke about politics — the politics of war and peace. Isaiah took off his clothes and wandered around Israel naked for three years. He was portraying the fate of Israel, as its neighbors Egypt and Nubia were soon to be dragged butt-naked into exile by the Assyrian army. Jeremiah placed an oxen yoke on his shoulders to dramatize that Babylon would soon place its yoke on the people of Judah. The prophets were telling their political leaders that their unjust rule had weakened the nation so much that their destruction was inevitable. The prophets had so much moral authority that the unhappy political leaders couldn't silence them.
• Then our course jumps to the New Testament. Jesus overturned the tables of the moneychangers in the Temple portico. The money changers were not violating the law, but they were profaning the holy place. So Jesus acted. Peter and Paul preached that Jesus, not the Roman emperor was the Son of God and were imprisoned. Ephesians Chapter 6 says "our struggle is … against the authorities and powers of this dark age." Today, as Christians, in South Sudan and elsewhere, we must be engaged in the struggle against the evils of this dark age.
• Our course would study religious leaders Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr, who modernized and transformed nonviolent resistance. The prophets usually acted courageously as lone voices against injustice. Gandhi, who studied the Hindu scriptures and Jesus, and King, the Baptist pastor, mobilized large groups of supporters to act in

solidarity for justice. In India the British colonial authorities were quite prepared to use deadly force to suppress demands for change. It was Gandhi's mobilization of millions of people that persuaded the British that they could not rely on violence but needed to negotiate. The result was Indian independence. It was King who used local organizations and Southern churches to mobilize people to march or boycott or demand services at restaurants. Before every protest people were trained in the tactics of nonviolence. If you are beaten, participants were told, do not react with violence. If you are arrested, go to jail with dignity. In the famous Selma march of April 1965, marchers were severely beaten by police, including future Congressman John Lewis. That bloody march, widely reported by the media, led to a much larger successful march that included people of all races and faiths. It led to the 1965 Voting Rights Act, which guaranteed to black Americans the right to vote.

• Our course would give attention to overall strategy. Direct action requires imagination. What kinds of action are likely to work best in South Sudan? Nonviolent direct action requires good leadership and careful planning. Good leadership is inclusive, drawing in women and youth. They establish a working group for planning. Moves need to be carefully visualized, drawing participants forward to the ultimate objective. Sequence and timing are important.

• Our course would develop a menu of nonviolent direct action choices suitable to South Sudan:

• Marches. Marches might seem a logical option. Religious leaders and activists can organize marches to include men, women, and youth from different churches and different tribes. Marches need careful organization to maximize participation, to promote specific objectives and to reduce risk. However, my South Sudan friends tell me that planning marches is very dangerous in South Sudan today. Given the highly decentralized deployment of forces — really just an array of militias, commanders who get news of planned demonstrations quickly arrest the alleged leaders who then disappear. So a march may not be the best option.

• But religious activists should apply their imagination and strategic insights to finding opportunities to mobilize people for peace. In some places, depending on the local commander, you might inform the commander in advance that a march is being planned. Objective: to get on with joint training of forces as a step toward the integrated Peoples Defense Forces envisaged in the Revitalized Agreement, that is, an objective that militia might support. If the commander prohibits the march, leaders could try to negotiate with him the conditions under which it might take place. Successful nonviolent action for peace requires imagination, good organization, and negotiations with potential opponents.

• A less risky option might be a group visit or sit-in at a military installation. A group of churches could arrange to go together to the local military headquarters to seek a meeting with the commander to make a pitch for cooperation in reducing criminal violence in their area. If a meeting is refused, they could try to remain to negotiate the scheduling of a later meeting. Participants would need to avoid showing hostility toward the military but rather courtesy, patience and persistence.

• A third option is street theater. Groups can perform skits or plays in public places to illustrate their demand for justice. They should use humor and pageantry to make presentations entertaining and draw spectators. Religious leaders and activists can draw on Biblical stories and themes to make the case imaginatively for peace and reconciliation.

• There have been examples of nonviolent religious action in South Sudan. In Mundri in 2017 there was an Inter-religious Women's March to the SPLA barracks carrying posters which read, "Stop killing the families of your enemies. You are destroying the future of our nation." The commander met with the women. He agreed, if they delivered the same message to the opposition. The women did so, and Mundri has since been pretty quiet. At the Catholic University in Juba the Likiriri Collective does storytelling and skits to speak about human rights and politics. The NGO Ana Taban has mobilized artists to stage skits in Juba in street markets to promote reconciliation. Much more street theater in Juba and other cities could be helpful.

What can the diaspora do?

• The theme of this conference is "uniting the diaspora to act for peace." Its purpose is to promote dialogue and community building across tribal and geographic lines. What can the Diaspora do? The goal, it seems to me, is to find ways to collaborate across denominational lines in interfaith peacebuilding. That kind of collaboration would simultaneously create cooperation across tribal and regional divisions. Episcopalians, who are Dinka in the majority but include many Equatorians and some Nuer, should join with Presbyterians, who are majority Nuer, and with Catholics, who are more mixed, to make sure that these efforts are national and inter-tribal. I will end with three suggestions.

1. Diaspora members should continue to work diligently to halt Diaspora-guided hate speech.The leadership of this conference has been candid in acknowledging that the diaspora — at least a particularly noisy and aggressive part of it — has contributed to civil war through hate speech. Bishop Isaiah Majok Dau, General Overseer of the Sudan/South Sudan Pentecostal Church and a board member of the South Sudan Council of Churches, has spoken wisely. "Words are powerful; especially [the] words that leaders speak. The Bible says that life and death are in the power of the tongue. So, we can make a choice to speak good, and it will come to pass, because whatever we say has power." The Diaspora

should expand its leadership in fighting hate speech.
2. Diaspora leaders should issue coordinated interfaith statements, when peace efforts seem to be flagging, aimed at speaking the truth to power on all sides — the President and his supporters, those who represent the IO and the SSOA, and Joseph Cirillo. The current period before November 12 is particularly critical, because failure to get a consensus unity government by the time the new deadline expires could put the entire Revitalized Agreement in jeopardy. Coordinated interfaith statements pressing for progress on cantonment, training of forces to be integrated into a single army, and final decisions on state boundaries could be helpful.
3. And, finally, Diaspora religious leaders and activists should consider organizing trauma healing programs for the Diaspora, particularly in its larger North American centers, like Virginia, Texas, Omaha, Denver, and Toronto. Trauma continues to affect members of the Diaspora not only creating great personal suffering, but directly contributing to conflict in South Sudan through hate speech. Attention to trauma healing has vastly expanded in the United States since 9/11 and because of the new awareness of the suffering of military veterans experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder. There are lots of professional resources available locally.

Closing Prayer
O God, we praise you for your holy Word — your word in Scripture. We praise you for your word in Jesus Christ, who came to lift up the poor and destitute, to liberate the captives and bring good news to the broken hearted. We praise you for the prophets you have lifted up in every age to protest injustice and war. Gracious God, let the anointing of your Holy Spirit continue to spread on us. Stir up your good gifts, visions and dreams in and beyond us. Let your Spirit continue to reshape our lives and give content and urgency to our voices. O Lord, be our drum major in the struggle for peace with justice in South Sudan. Amen.

Footnotes:

1. *p.2*
   USAID's Viable Support to Transition and Stability (VISTAS) in 2017 and 2018 used "Morning Star," a modified form of the Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience (STAR) program developed at the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Virginia.
2. *p.28*
3. *"The Rapid Support Forces and the Escalation of Violence in Sudan," https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/rapid-support-forces-and-escalation-violence-sudan , July 2, 2019*

4. *Erica Chenoweth & Maria Stephan, Why Civil Resistance Works:The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict, 2011*
5. *https://www.qz.com/africa/1448939/south-sudan-creatives-use-theater-for-peace/*