

## **Sudanese Bishops Tell What Makes for Real Peace**

Pastoral Letter on Agreement Between Government and SPLA

KHARTOUM, Sudan, FEB. 28, 2005 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Sudanese bishops called for prayers along with individual and community efforts to build peace, after the signing of an agreement to end the nation's long-running civil war.

"True peace is much more than the absence of war," say the prelates in a recent pastoral letter on the agreement signed Jan. 9 between the Khartoum government and rebels of the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA).

It might mean the real end of a 21-year-old war that has left more than 2 million dead -- especially from sicknesses and hunger -- and almost 5 million displaced persons and refugees.

The armed conflict broke out in 1983, the year in which then President Gaafar Nimeiry established Shariah, Islamic law.

Forced Islamization of the southern populations began in 1989. Since then, the civil war has confronted the northern regime -- the Khartoum government, which is Arab, white, and Muslim, and the southern rebellion, involving black Africans who are primarily animist and Christian.

The agreement, signed in Nairobi, Kenya, concluded the talks that began in October 2002. The Sudanese north will be able to enforce Shariah, while the south will have the right to six years of autonomy, at the end of which it will be able to decide its independence by referendum.

The agreement also establishes the distribution of 50% of the country's oil resources, the formation of new armed forces, and the participation of SPLA rebels in the Khartoum executive branch of government.

In their message, the bishops stress that "the peace we seek to build in civil society is an order and harmony in the community so that individual persons and the communities themselves can develop fully and freely."

Noting that peace building has "social, economic, political, cultural and religious" dimensions, the prelates urge "each and everyone as citizens responsible for building such peace to contribute according to their God-given talents and capacities."

To carry out this task in its religious dimension, the bishops of Sudan urge Catholics to "find in the Eucharist our source of unity and strength."

They also exhort the faithful to come together and celebrate Sunday as the Lord's Day, in every place, large or small, -- even in the absence of priests or pastoral agents whose number is insufficient, with praise, prayer, reading of the Word, recitation of the rosary, and "reflections on their Christian responsibilities."

The bishops also appealed to the faithful to respect the religious beliefs and freedom of

conscience of all peoples, in the awareness that "our civic communities are multi-ethnic and multi-religious."

"As Catholics we encourage all persons to follow their conscience and we respect their religious beliefs and practices. We exhort our faithful to join with other faith-based groups to engage in common initiatives for the benefit of our people," they write.

The Sudanese bishops add: "We must feel called to live out our faith with pride and without fear or shame as the greatest gift to be developed in our peace time."

They also stress the importance of reconciliation in peace building: "Ask pardon for offenses committed. Forgive or reconcile with those who have offended you."

In addition, they exhort Catholics to "take part in civic education initiatives that will better inform you of your basic human rights and civic duties," and to protect and promote their "own basic rights" and those of others, especially vulnerable groups, and fulfill their civic responsibilities and, especially, "to take part in the process of self-determination."

Last January's agreement does not include the western region of Darfur, scene of armed confrontations since February 2003.