



January 31, 2014

Attached and copied below please find a Pastoral Exhortation entitled "Let us refound our nation on a new covenant", issued by the Catholic bishops of Sudan and South Sudan during their meeting in Juba from 21st to 31st January 2014.

BEGIN

PASTORAL EXHORTATION

FROM THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF SUDAN AND SOUTH SUDAN

Meeting in Juba from 21st - 31st January 2014

LET US REFOUND OUR NATION ON A NEW COVENANT

The Lord said to Moses, 'Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them'. (Exodus

32:7-8)

Preamble

The Catholic bishops of Sudan and South Sudan, meeting in Extraordinary Plenary assembly of the Sudan Catholic Bishops'

Conference in Juba, South Sudan, from 21st to 31st January 2014, address this Pastoral Exhortation to the people of the two nations and to all people of good will who journey with us. We welcome the new Papal Nuncio to South Sudan, Archbishop Charles Daniel Balvo. We are grateful for the presence amongst us of our brother bishops from the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa (AMECEA) and for their message of solidarity. We encourage them to advocate on our behalf with the member governments of the African Union and IGAD as they lead international peace efforts.

We meet at a time of crisis, perhaps one of the gravest situations we have ever faced. Our vision of a liberated nation in which all people will be equal and live in peace appears to be shattered. The blood of the innocent, in their thousands, cries out from the ground! The Lord will judge harshly those who continue to murder, rape and loot his innocent children, and even more harshly those who incite this violence and fail to prevent it in their greed for power. We affirm the dignity and right to life of every human being created in God's image and likeness. The cease-fire signed on 23rd January 2014 must be implemented in good faith. There are no excuses for not doing so.

Then the Lord said to Cain, 'Where is your brother Abel?' He said, 'I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?' And the Lord said, 'What have you done? Listen; your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground!' (Genesis 4:9-10)

At this time more than ever, the bold Prophetic Voice of the Church needs to be heard, and we speak from our hearts. You are your brother's and sister's keeper! In November 2010 and again in April

2011 we wrote, "Sudan will never be the same again"; in January 2014 we say, "South Sudan must never be the same again". There is no longer "business as usual". Now is the time for our nation to rise from the ashes, but not to take up where the old one left off. Now is the time for a new nation.

However Jesus came not to condemn but to redeem. We too do not condemn individuals, but we condemn evil and seek to heal both individuals and our nation. We call for repentance and conversion of heart. Let those who have committed atrocities admit it honestly. Admission of guilt is a virtue, not a weakness. We invite the prodigal son to return to the family, the lost sheep to the fold, the sinner to right behaviour.

We have been shocked by the events that have rocked our new nation since December 2013. We have witnessed things that should never have taken place on the soil of this nation, as brother fought against brother, leading to so much unnecessary death and displacement of individuals and communities, with many fleeing as refugees to neighbouring countries, and the most appalling destruction. We cannot remain silent in the face of what we have witnessed and heard. We speak on behalf of those who have spoken to us, people now displaced and destitute. We speak on behalf of the silent victims of our two nations. Violence is the daily experience of so many of our peoples in South Sudan, Darfur, the Nuba Mountains, Abyei and Blue Nile.

Causes of the Conflict

We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ. (Ephesians 4:14-15)

This crisis has been caused by many issues which need to be addressed:

a. We have witnessed the growing tensions within the governing party, the SPLM. The failure to deal with these through internal party mechanisms has played a significant role in the escalation of tension that preceded the violence that erupted on 15th December 2013.

Democratic reform is urgently required within the SPLM. Internal party disputes should not be allowed to destabilise the nation.

b. We stress the need for better governance. Too often we see the tendency to personalise political power, to behave in ways counter to the best interests of our communities, a failure to appreciate that public office is a service to the people. Our institutions across the country need to be staffed by individuals chosen for their competency and professionalism.

c. Corruption and nepotism have contributed to the destabilisation of South Sudan. This has prevented basic services from reaching the people and is breeding resentment and disillusionment towards the institutions of our state.

d. Our history is an open wound that desperately needs healing. We must heal our society by allowing our communities to tell their stories openly and without fear. Negative narratives fester and poison our social relations. We retell them in our villages to our children.

Let us end these vicious cycles by creating space where we can speak and work towards peaceful coexistence and reconciliation.

THE WAY FORWARD...

Truth and Reconciliation

The reconciliation we seek is a process that involves truth telling, knowing what happened when violence erupted between various communities, and why. Thereafter one can speak of accountability, restitution, forgiveness, and peaceful coexistence. There are no quick-fixes to the deep social divisions and trauma within our society. With time and by promoting processes that are holistic and people-centred, we believe that our painful history and our trauma can be healed and our nation reconciled. This is our expectation of the National Committee on Healing, Peace and Reconciliation. This Church-led committee must not fail in its important mission. However reconciliation is not only the work of specialised committees.

Reconciliation must become the single most important priority at every level of national life. The National Budget must reflect this, as must the plans of all ministries, government bodies, UN agencies, NGOs (including international NGOs) and all institutions and individuals.

Inclusive Negotiations

We are critical of the exclusion of the Churches and other civic forces from the peace talks in Addis Ababa, not for the first time; they were excluded from the IGAD talks which led to the CPA in 2005, despite the leading role the Churches had played in advocacy and working for peace. In 2013, Churches were asked to lead the Committee for National Healing, Peace and Reconciliation, and to negotiate an end to the rebellion led by David Yau Yau in Jonglei State; in 2012, a Church leader was asked to chair the Jonglei peace process; previously Church leaders were asked to negotiate with George Athor. Why are Church and civic leaders now excluded from the ongoing IGAD talks? Why is it that only those who took up arms are discussing the future of our country? What is the legitimacy of any agreement signed in Addis Ababa built on military groups determining our future? A handful of political leaders instigated a crisis in which their followers have devastated the country; how can they alone be entrusted with negotiating the future of the nation without input from the citizens?

The message of peace is not about a negotiated settlement but rather the conviction that the unity brought by the Spirit can harmonize every diversity. It overcomes every conflict by creating a new and promising synthesis. Diversity is a beautiful thing when it can constantly enter into a process of reconciliation and seal a sort of cultural covenant resulting in a "reconciled diversity". (Evangelii Gaudium, 230)

Governance and Democratic Institutions

But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains. (1 Timothy 6:9-10)

Our young nation has embraced democracy as our political system of governance, which offers those who wish to stand for elected office and represent their communities an opportunity to do so. We must openly challenge each other on the future of our country, but we must ensure that our disagreements are dealt with openly and in

a civil manner, firmly rejecting all recourse to violence. Resolving our problems through violent means reveals the lack of maturity and depth in our democratic system. We cannot allow South Sudan to fail due to the actions of a few who are immune to the suffering of their own people, who personalise political power, turning their positions of public service into opportunities for personal enrichment and nepotism. Our state institutions must be strong enough to prevent this, and public leaders must be mature and ethical in their service of this nation.

The country needs accountability and transparency from its elected leaders and government officials. There must be no impunity for crimes committed by political leaders, officials, armed forces, police and others. Impunity for senior leaders gives legitimacy to unacceptable behaviour patterns within our society.

Responsible Reporting and Public Communication

We are critical of the conduct of both national and international media institutions. It is often stated that truth is the first victim of war. We still do not know what actually happened to trigger the recent violence, as no investigation has yet been conducted, but the media quickly lost sight of their duty to report responsibly and impartially. Reports based on information which may not have been accurate inflamed violence and revenge attacks and induced panic.

Journalists and the whole of society must embrace their identity as peacemakers and reconcilers, ensuring that communication is truthful, and that negative stereotyping of communities does not happen.

Responsible reporting should not create hatred and violence.

We call upon our national leaders and all in public office to communicate responsibly. In the interest of peace, stability and national unity we urge them to refrain from hate speech, incitement to violence, propaganda, abuse, misinformation, untrue and exaggerated statements, unfounded allegations, speculations and rumours.

Reform of the Organised Forces

The reform of our organised forces, especially our national army and police, is urgent. Our army has grown in size since the signing of the CPA and has become a significant cost to our nation, at the expense of investment in development priorities. It lacks cohesion. We are conscious of the need to address reconciliation within the armed forces themselves. There is no longer any place for personal militias.

We believe our armed forces need urgent support and pastoral care. We also feel that our national army needs a new name, not associated with a single political party. A professional army should never be involved in politics.

We deplore the manner in which children have been conscripted and recruited into armed forces during the current conflict. Children have no place in the conflict. The manner in which our youth were manipulated has left much to be desired. We urge those who exploit the youth and incite them to illegal activities to desist.

We call upon all armed groups, whether government or opposition, whether formal or informal, to respect international norms for armed conflict. This includes respect for and protection of civilians, dignified treatment of prisoners of war, and refraining from extra-judicial killings. The Church and other agencies which assist the people have been targeted and looted; pastors from our sister churches have lost their lives and we fear for the safety of some of our own personnel. We insist on respect for institutions such as hospitals, churches and places where displaced civilians shelter

Education

Education is essential for the future of the nation, and for building peace and reconciliation. National schools can strengthen diversity.

Centres for peace and development studies can help the growth of the nation. Education can help people understand the structures and dynamics of society. But there must be more than simply academic education; it should include formation in moral and ethical values.

Many of our leaders are churchgoers, but their behaviour does not indicate a good moral life. We need to form consciences and professional ethics.

Violence in Sudan

As we focus on South Sudan, we remain painfully aware of the suffering of the peoples of the Nuba Mountains, Darfur and Blue Nile in Sudan, and the contested area of Abyei. Daily bombing causes great suffering and death to civilians. Confined in their own areas, they do not have access to food, medicines, vaccines and other humanitarian necessities. Women, children and the elderly shelter in caves. Many have been displaced. They too deserve justice and peace, the freedom to practice their own culture and religion, and full citizen rights in the land of their birth. The people of Abyei are yet to receive the official referendum which they were guaranteed in the CPA; we support their right to determine their own political future. South Sudanese and Christians in Sudan also deserve to have their basic human rights guaranteed, and we condemn attempts to harass and restrict the activities of the Church.

We Commit Ourselves

We commit ourselves to the rebuilding that is necessary within our new nation. The task ahead is daunting, but we stand in solidarity with those who need our support. We express our solidarity with our pastoral agents: local personnel, missionaries, and laity. They have chosen to stay with their people at great personal risk.

The Diocese of Malakal, covering the three states of Jonglei, Unity and Upper Nile, will receive our particular attention as we source more local personnel, missionaries and other resources to ensure that the immediate and long-term needs of this Diocese are supported. The humanitarian crisis in this Diocese is particularly acute and we appeal to all agencies, especially our own Caritas Internationalis family, to support these vulnerable communities through all possible means, while not forgetting the needs in other parts of our two countries. The presence of the Church in the rural parts of Greater Upper Nile will help to bring stability and human development.

We offer ourselves, our time and our energy, and the resources of our Church to support the mediation process.

We reiterate our support and ownership of the Committee for National Healing, Peace and Reconciliation.

We commit ourselves to continuing our long-standing education programmes.

We offer our Catholic Radio Network and other media resources to support the process of peace and reconciliation.

The Building of a New Nation

Jesus said, 'Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell--and great was its fall!' (Matthew 7:24-27)

We are convinced that we stand at a decisive moment in the history of South Sudan. Fundamental choices must be made about how we deal with our past and present history, about how we govern ourselves as a nation, about how state institutions serve the poor. We must seize from the present crisis an opportunity to re-found our nation on democratic principles of dialogue, inclusion, and respect for diversity, God's gift to humanity. We encourage that which strengthens diversity and weakens barriers. We need to work to support the notion that we are one nation sharing one identity, rich in culture, blessed by diversity, which is to be celebrated. Mature and strong leaders can help us to see beyond ourselves to that which is beautiful in our societies. Insecure leaders will remind us of our differences, drive wedges between our communities, and ultimately destroy us. Where are our Mandelas and Nyereres? Where are those who will lead us in re-founding this newly independent nation? We proclaim our hope and expectation that the people of South Sudan can and will rise above the crisis.

Let our nations be built not on foundations of sand but on strong foundations of truth, justice, reconciliation, diversity and peace, on the foundations of the Gospel values enshrined in Catholic Social Teaching. Hear these words and be wise!

When the crisis erupted, our people turned spontaneously to prayer. We call on the nation and all people of good will to continue to accompany the peace and reconciliation process with prayer and fasting. Furthermore, we appeal to our leaders to join their people in this endeavour.

May God bless you.

Given this 30th day of January 2014 in Juba, South Sudan.

H E Cardinal Gabriel Zubeir Wako

Archbishop of Khartoum

President of SCBC

H G Paulino Lukudu Loro

Archbishop of Juba

H L Erkolano Lodu Tombe

Bishop of Yei

Vice-President of SCBC

H L Rudolf Deng Majak

Bishop of Wau

H L Eduardo Hiiboro Kussala

Bishop of Tombura Yambio

H L Michael Didi Adgum

Bishop of El Obeid

Mgr Roko Taban Mousa

Apostolic Administrator of Malakal

Mgr Thomas Oliha Attiyah

Apostolic Administrator of Torit

H L Santo Loku Pio

Auxiliary Bishop of Archdiocese of Juba

H L Macram Max Gassis

Bishop Emeritus of El Obeid

Fr John Mathiang

Coordinator of Rumbek