



SSCBS – JUBA

South Sudan Catholic Bishops' Secretariat
P.O. Box 258 – Juba
South Sudan

MESSAGE OF THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF SOUTH SUDAN ON THE OCCASION OF THE HOLY FATHER'S GLOBAL DAY OF PRAYER AND FASTING FOR PEACE IN SOUTH SUDAN, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO AND THE WORLD



'LET YOUR HEARTS BE TRANSFORMED' (Joel 2:13)

23rd February 2018.

We, the Catholic Bishops of South Sudan, meeting in Juba from 21st to 23rd February 2018, express our gratitude to the Holy Father Pope Francis for calling the whole world to pray and fast for peace in South Sudan, DRC and other conflicts. We are encouraged by the Holy Father's personal interest in our nation, and we renew our invitation to him to visit us when the time is right.

We reiterate our past messages: the killing must stop. It is unacceptable to be negotiating positions and percentages while the killing continues.

We thank international and regional bodies for their commitment to revitalising our peace process, although we note that some of these actors may also have their own interests. We hope that Phase 3 of the High Level Revitalisation Forum will end the violence. We are dissatisfied that our leaders, in both government and opposition, have so far been unable to put their own interests aside and make peace for the good of the people and the nation. We implore them in the words of Psalm 95:8, "Harden not your hearts".

We fear that our leaders do not know how to make peace. They are confused. They are military people who see the world through the lens of violence. They need help, not so much with the technical and political details, but with the spiritual and moral courage to make peace, to hold a vision of the future which includes peace. Their hearts need to be touched. They need help to discern how to "beat their swords into ploughshares" (Isaiah 2:4).

Many of them are traumatised, like many of the people of South Sudan. Trauma can paralyse people, make them behave inappropriately, erode their morale and morals, and lead to self-pity and denial. They need trauma healing.

They fear peace. They are finishing their own people. They have called on their followers of whichever tribe to sacrifice for some gain, but what is the gain? The leaders are afraid to return to the people without anything to show, so they continue this senseless war because they do not know what to do. To continue fighting is easier for them than to take the risk of making peace. They fear not only international justice, but they fear what their own people will do to them when they fail.

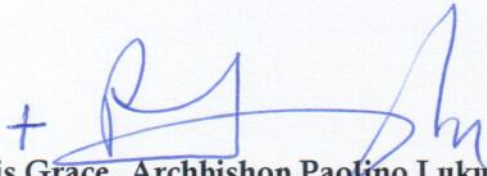
They have already failed. More than four years of war, tens of thousands of deaths, millions of people displaced, looting, rape, hunger, economic collapse, breakdown of the rule of law, destruction of the nation's infrastructure, children denied education, families denied health care... these represent failure. How many more deaths do there need to be, how many more failures, before they will admit that they have failed and that they don't know what to do?

We have asked ourselves, how can we help them to overcome their fear and confusion? How can we help them to reconcile, not merely politically but deep in their hearts? We have issued many statements, but they have not been heard. We repeat again: the killing must stop immediately. We must let the guns fall to the ground in order to free our hands so that we can embrace each other.

In 2015 our South Sudan Council of Churches issued a Statement of Intent in which we offered to create Neutral Forums where the leaders of the government and of the main opposition parties, other armed groups and political factions could meet for dialogue in a safe space. We the Catholic bishops pledge our full support to this process, which should include a spiritual retreat, to be led by religious leaders from South Sudan and elsewhere. The theme of the retreat would not be political – it would be a healing retreat to bring about personal transformation to prepare the participants to face the task of making peace. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9). We South Sudanese will resolve our own issues if we can change our hearts.

We call on all people of good will to join us today for prayer and fasting for peace, and to continue with prayer and fasting on a regular basis in the coming months. We also recognise with sadness that many of our people in South Sudan are actually fasting continuously as they have no food to eat. Peace will come when the hearts of the South Sudanese leaders are changed. Let us pray for that conversion.

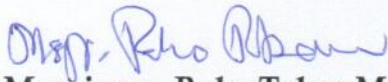
May God bless you.



- 1- His Grace, Archbishop Paolino Lukudu Loro,
Metropolitan Archbishop of Juba



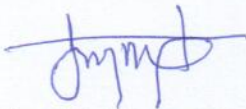
- 2- H.L. Bishop Erkolano Lodu Tombe
Bishop of Yei Diocese



- 3- Monsignor Roko Taban Mousa
Apostolic Administrator of Malakal Diocese.



- 4- Bishop Paride Taban
Bishop Emeritus of Torit Diocese



- 5- Fr. John Mathiang Machol,
Diocesan Coordinator of Rumbek Diocese



- 6- Fr. Marco Mangu Adilio
Diocesan Coordinator of Wau Diocese