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Nairobi, Monday, 19 November, 2018

Press statement:

The Society of Jesus (Jesuits) in Africa and Madagascar Condemn the Brutal Murder of Fr. Victor-Luke Odhiambo, SJ – a Jesuit Priest in Cueibet, South Sudan – and call for Justice, Reconciliation, Peace and a Complete Disarmament in South Sudan

We, the Jesuits of Africa and Madagascar, strongly condemn the horrific murder of Fr. Victor-Luke Odhiambo SJ, a Jesuit priest from Kenya, on 15 November 2018, in Cueibet, South Sudan. Our hearts go out to the family of Fr. Odhiambo, praying that the Risen Christ console them.

Fr. Odhiambo worked in war-torn South Sudan for over ten years. He was gunned down by unknown assailants who stormed the Jesuit Community. At the time of death, Fr. Odhiambo was the Principal of Mazzolari Teachers' College in Cueibet and Acting Superior of the Community. He had been a Jesuit for 40 years. Fr. Odhiambo will be buried today in Cueibet, on the grounds of the College, where he gave his life in service to Christ's mission.

Fr. Odhiambo dedicated his life to the service of the people of God through education. He developed close mentoring and supportive relationship with his students who trusted and respected him. He was a servant of Christ's mission, giving life and hope to the hopeless, the disadvantaged and the vulnerable. In his message of condolence to the Jesuits in Eastern Africa, Father General Arturo Sosa SJ, recognized Fr. Odhiambo as "a very courageous man, intelligent, caring, creative administrator and above all a believer in the value of education. He was not afraid of venturing into the unknown even into the most dangerous of places once he was convinced it was the Lord's mission."

South Sudan has known conflicts for many years and remains the most fragile state in the world. Jesuits and their partners in mission have worked in Wau, Kajokeji, Tabura-Yambio, Lobone, Nimule, Yei, Maban, Rumbek, Cueibet and Juba, and several of them have been attacked multiple times, forced to abandon a school in Wau at the peak of the war, ambushed by armed gangs, kidnapped, and witnessed violent attacks on innocent South Sudanese. The Jesuit General Congregation 36 decried the toll of conflict and violence in places like South Sudan, stating: "Since the last General Congregation, we have seen situations of heart-breaking conflict in many parts of the world. The sad litany includes Syria and South Sudan, Colombia and the Great Lakes region of Africa, the Central African Republic, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Iraq and so many other places. There has been devastating loss of life and massive



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displacement of peoples. These conflicts have a global reach. Those who serve at the frontline have been especially affected” (“Witnesses of Friendship and Reconciliation: A message and a prayer for Jesuits living in zones of war and conflict”). In all these situations, Jesuits have been unwavering in their solidarity with the local church and the people of South Sudan.

According to the United Nations and its agencies, the combination of armed conflict, inter-communal violence, disease outbreaks and economic crisis has killed over 50,000 civilians, displaced one in every four South Sudanese, made over 2 million refugees and impeded the country’s progress since independence in 2011. Presently, 7.5 million South Sudanese urgently need humanitarian assistance and protection.

The violence in South Sudan is largely attributed to antagonistic competition for power, inter-clan rivalry enshrined in a revenge culture and, most importantly, proliferation of small arms and light weapons. Revenge killings or what some people understand as blood compensation has created unending cycle of violence that has produced millions of orphans and widows who are also looking for an opportunity to revenge.

To address the protracted situation in South Sudan, we, the Jesuits in Africa,

1. Call upon the Government of South Sudan to take action to protect the lives of all its citizens and all those living and working in South Sudan, irrespective of nationality, ethnicity, religion or political affiliations;
2. Demand that those responsible for the murder of Fr. Odhiambo be found and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. This is important to end the culture of impunity that has become common in the country;
3. Call for immediate and comprehensive disarmament in South Sudan;
4. Condemn the proliferation of illegal small arms and light weapons in South Sudan, largely supplied by Western and Asian countries, and call for immediate end to the supply of these arms. We encourage all anti-illegal arms advocates, civil society, religious groups, governments and private individuals to join hands in calling for an end to sale of arms to illegal groups in South Sudan;
5. Appeal to the international community to increase peacekeeping support and development aid to South Sudan in order to promote economic recovery, strengthen



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essential social and political institutions, entrenchment of the rule of law; and, more importantly, provide access to quality and equitable education for all throughout South Sudan;

6. Request that the international community take immediate action to scrutinize and help improve the economic situation in South Sudan through more transparent tax collection systems to prevent the abuse of existing structures for personal gains from the country's meagre sources of revenue;
7. Call for a strengthening of the leadership of the local church and the prompt and appropriate appointment of substantive leaders so that they can address pressing matters of faith and justice that affect the local population;
8. Urge the African Union, regional governments and the international community to support the implementation of the peace agreement reached on 12 September 2018 between President Salva Kiir and his former deputy president, Riak Machar;
9. Appeal to all parents, leaders of families, clans, states and the nation in South Sudan to come together and unequivocally say no to the culture of violence and death. We must overcome the forces of hate with the spirit and power of love, justice, peace and reconciliation.

In fidelity to our mission of reconciliation and justice, we renew our commitment to continue collaboration with the local church and all people of goodwill for the advancement of the reign of God through our ministries and works in South Sudan.

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