



South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC), P. O BOX 209 Juba, South Sudan.

Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> May 2020

## SSCC PASTORAL STATEMENT ON COVID-19

*“What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don’t show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone?” (St. James 2:14).*

### 1. INTRODUCTION.

The Church acknowledges that COVID-19 the diseased caused by corona virus is not only a global pandemic but a reality in South Sudan. This disease is here with us in South Sudan - and the Lord God is calling unto us to cement our faith in Him with the necessary action to combat this pandemic.

The Church indeed appreciates the quick action by the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGoNU) to form the *High-Level Taskforce on COVID-19*, to lead sustained national response and intervention on prevention of this pandemic. We further appreciate the multiple preventive and control measures that this National Taskforce has so far put in place including; temporary cancellation of regional and international flights, closure of borders, ban on large social gathering, a curfew that begins at 10 pm and ends at 6 am and restrictions on movement and other partial lockdowns measures. The Church also appreciates the tremendous efforts of the Taskforce to: heighten surveillance, identify cases, isolate and treat infected persons and stepping up health precautions.

The Church appreciates the role played by donors, international and local partners in supporting the efforts of the government to address this difficult challenge at this very difficult time when our beloved country is just beginning to consolidate peace and stability after several years of armed conflicts, instability and economic stagnation.

The Church is greatly concerned that this infectious disease is spreading in the country at very alarming rate. We can only contain this pandemic if every citizen makes a personal commitment to fight it. Our people must for sure understand that basic preventative measures by individuals and communities remain the most powerful tools to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Therefore, unless each and every person works hard enough to quickly control the spread of this virus, it is likely to overwhelm us.

The only certain resource that the Lord God has bestowed upon us in controlling the spread of this pandemic is our own selves as vessels of control. Therefore, the Church appeals to everyone in South Sudan, both national and foreigners, to keenly observe the public health measures, guidelines



and directives on COVID-19, put forward by the Government and the World Health Organization (WHO).

The Board of Trustees of the South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC), by the divine Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit formed the *South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC) Task-force on COVID -19* on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2020, with the purpose of complementing the efforts of the *National High-Level Taskforce on COVID-19* and other stakeholders in addressing this global pandemic.

## **2. MANDATE OF THE SSCC TASKFORCE ON COVID-19.**

The mandate of *the SSCC Taskforce on COVID-19* is grounded on the Church's divine pastoral and spiritual call to work in the vineyard of the Lord. Specifically:

- 2.1 To develop a shared understanding of the COVID-19 situation in the country and ensure united messaging and accurate information sharing in-line with the measures and guidelines of the South Sudan National Taskforce on COVID-19, the Ministry of Health and World Health Organization (WHO).
- 2.2 To ensure ecumenical and interfaith collaboration in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 2.3 To ensure adherence to rights-based and pro-people approaches and interventions including service delivery.

## **3. MESSAGE OF THE SSCC TASKFORCE ON COVID-19.**

The *SSCC Taskforce on COVID-19* herein makes a passionate appeal to: Christians and the people of South Sudan; Religious Leaders, Media Houses, Civil Society Organizations including professional associations, community-based organizations, academics and community leaders, the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGoNU), Donors, International Community and International Non Governmental Organizations (INGOs); as follows:

### **3.1 To Christians and People of God in South Sudan:**

The Church calls upon the people of South Sudan to adhere to the directions, guidelines and advice of the Government, the Ministry of Health and the World Health Organization (WHO), especially on calls to avoid social gatherings.

Concerned that many people continue to live their lives with complete disregard for the severity of the threats of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Church leaders throughout the country should take lead in informing and encouraging people to adhere to the public health guidelines on this pandemic.

We herein remind every citizen that our beloved country is just emerging from a devastating civil war that almost tore us apart. As citizens of this fragile young but promising nation, each one of us has a national obligation to join hands with one another, in one accord, to protect ourselves and our beloved fellow citizens from this disease. We have lost enough lives to the civil war and multiple inter-communal violence - and we must work hard to avoid loss of lives to *corona virus (COVID-19)*.

We note with deep concern that uncontrolled spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has the potential to derail the implementation of the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the



Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS), whose making involved and continues to require a lot of sacrifices, compromise and tolerance. Indeed, anything that can undermine the peace and stability of our great nation is certainly being the concern of every citizen.

Consequently, we appeal to everyone *to stop gathering in funerals, family functions, evening tea places, shisha installs, bars, restaurants and social discussions groupings in towns. Stop the traditional practice of shaking hands. Stop large gatherings of extended families. Stop the get-together gatherings of friends in houses and under the trees.* These gatherings pose the greatest threat to the spread of corona virus. Please, please listen to this prophetic voice of the Church and stop it today.

### **3.2 To our Religious-Networks, Media Houses, Civil Society Organisations including Professional Associations, Community-Based Organisations, Academics and Community Leaders.**

We acknowledge that several people have not been adequately reached with credible information about COVID-19. Most of our people are still ignorant about the potential danger posed by this pandemic. We have also reliably learnt that in both urban and rural areas, there is a lot of misinformation, misinterpretation of information and stigma, socio-cultural perspectives and mistaken religious interpretations that continue to impede the great efforts on preventing the spread of the corona virus (COVID-19) and managing its impact.

The Church call on you to educate our people and let them know that the solution is with them. Let everybody know that if they do not adhere to the measures and guidelines provided by the government and partners then the spread and impact of this pandemic will overwhelm our efforts. Both the highly populated areas including the camps of internally displace persons (IDPs) and refugees and the far off rural areas with poor infrastructure and limited access to communication services require innovative, robust and sustained collective public outreach. Inform our people to observe the measures put in place by the National High-level Taskforce on COVID-19, Ministry of Health and World Health Organization (WHO) to prevent the spread of this pandemic among our communities.

The Church further calls on you to reach out to every influential person including religious leaders, chiefs, elders, youth leaders, women leader's community intellectuals and opinion leaders in both urban and rural areas and let them further trickle down these concerns to our people. The *SSCC Taskforce on COVID-19* with its ecumenical members and partners will be working closely with the State and non-state actors to coordinate nationwide efforts on prevention of the spread of this pandemic.

### **3.3 Message to the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGoNU).**

The Church welcomes the timely formation and operationalizing of the *National High-Level Taskforce on COVID-19* by the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGoNU) as it demonstrates the traditional and primary mandate of the State to protect and safeguard the lives of its citizens.



The Church welcomes progress and efforts made in the fight against the spread of the pandemic, expresses concerns that institutional, operational, technical, human resource and financial capacity limitations have slowed down surveillance, contact tracing, testing, case management and effective enforcement of public health guidelines on prevention of the spread of this pandemic.

The Church encourages the government to set aside as much resources as it can to effectively facilitate an effective and robust overall response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the country. *The National High-Level Taskforce on COVID-19* must move effectively, efficiently and with speed to put in place systems and procedures that will ensure transparent and accountable custody and utilization of resources set aside to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Church emphasizes that throughout the fight against the spread of COVID-19, safety of citizens must be the first priority at all levels of government in South Sudan. On this note, the Church calls on *the National High-Level Taskforce on COVID-19* to urgently develop and share, *a clear national strategy and work plan* to fight the pandemic so that it helps to guide, coordinate and streamline the efforts of all stakeholders contributing to the prevention and spread of this disease in South Sudan.

The Church is deeply concerned in the delay of the formation of the Revitalized States and Local governments, and further calls upon the R-TGoNU to expedite the formation because the massive work involved in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic requires an enabling administrative structure that can effectively coordinate interventions, information sharing, public action, inter-agency networking, service delivery and security governance throughout the country.

The Church appeals to the signatories and non-signatories to the R-ARCSS to immediately cease all military confrontations and adhere to the provisions of the Permanent Ceasefire and the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement so as to create a conducive environment for successful prevention and elimination of COVID-19 in our country.

#### **3.4 To Donors, Regional and International Partners, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and People of Good-will.**

The Church indeed appreciates the continuous role played by our donors, international partners and International Non-Governmental Organizations. You have always stood with the people of South Sudan. You held our hands during our most trying moments. We plead with you to continue supporting us - and more specifically in regard to preventing the spread and managing the trauma and impact of COVID-19. We continue to value your unwavering support.

The Church appeals to the donors, implementing agencies and the wider international community to ensure their donations to South Sudan for COVID-19 response transparently contribute to a clear unified national plan to fight this COVID-19 pandemic.

In the midst of this desperate situation, God is calling every individual person into a deeper participation and prayers. There is still hope in the good news of the Gospel. As was in the early Church, a vulnerable community at threat of persecution and hardship, St. Paul wrote to the people of Rome saying: *“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nothing present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* (Romans 8:38-39).




#### 4. CONCLUSION.


We are all called to the service of God - each one of us individually - and together as one people, one nation and one divine creation of God. Let us individually and collectively use our unique God-given gifts and capacities to contribute to the prevention and elimination of the corona virus (COVID-19) in South Sudan.

SIGNED:

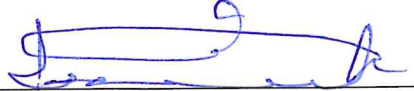
  
Bishop Dr. Arkanjelo WANI LEMI  
Chairman, South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC).

  
Rt. Rev. James PAR TAP HON  
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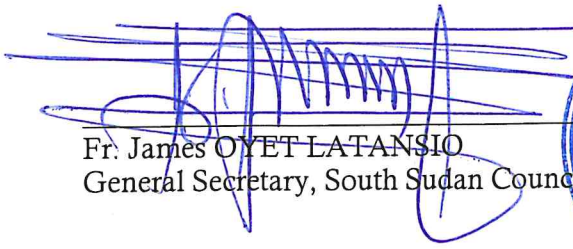
  
The Most Rev. Msgr. Dr. Stephen AMEYU MARTIN MULLA  
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