

**JOINT STATEMENT OF PEACE
BY THE INTER-FAITH COUNCIL FOR PEACE INITIATIVE
AND
INTER-CHURCH COMMITTEE
WESTERN EQUATORIA STATE**

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2Cor.5:18-20)

Hold fast to the rope of God all and do not separate (Surah a'al Omran verse 103)

THEME: A CALL TO RESPONSIBILITY FOR HARMONIOUS CO-EXISTENCE

To the people of God and people of good will,

Preamble

Greetings and peace to you from the leadership of the faith based communities in Western Equatoria State (WES). In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, we earnestly plead with you to hold on to God and be grounded in our faith in Him. We call upon you to love and care for one another. We are reminded to put our faith, hope and trust in God who raised Jesus from the dead and gave him glory. We are called to be the followers of Jesus sent on God's mission to give life to all and to work for peace and unity of all peoples.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a reality in WES and in the country at large. Though we do not have enough resources to fight it, we have one another and God on our side. To overcome this pandemic, we need to take care of ourselves and one another. We need to educate one another, and we need to coordinate our response as a State which is united, mindful of the plights of its people and determined to fight the pandemic with the patriotic spirit of oneness and love of God. We acknowledge that we live in a difficult and trying time. In the midst of all the assailing challenges and misfortunes that beset us as a country and state, we are immensely grateful to God for his divine sustenance that has and continues to see us through, particularly during this time of the COVID- 19 pandemic.

We welcome and commend the government of South Sudan for the formation of the Transitional Government of National Unity albeit the slow implementation of the signed protocols. We congratulate the Governor of WES, Hon Alfred Futuyo as we pledge our support to work with him to achieve a peaceful and prosperous WES.

The people of WES are known for being peace loving and resilient and who boldly take initiatives that build bridges across aggrieved individuals, groups and communities. There have various kind of these initiatives, notably by the Inter Faith and Inter Church committees that have in the recent past reconciled and brought about peace and stability in the region.

Despite this inherent good spirit and gestures, there are myriads of challenges and problems that beset WES. The persistence of these unfortunate situations have affected and continues to affect the citizens of WES in many ways. Our people lack basic access to medical services and many die of diseases and disorders which are otherwise treatable. This year, God has blessed us with abundant rainfall, but which has caused flooding across states and the entire country. The victims have not received adequate solidarity and support. Our hearts and prayers go out to them. We would like to highlight some few of these challenges and call your attention to them:

Challenges calling for immediate attention

1. The slow implementation of the Revitalized Peace Agreement

The incomplete formation of national and state government structures and institutions poses serious challenges of instability and destitution in the States and the country at large. A further delay in the implementation of the signed agreements worsens the suffering of our people particularly the Internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees.

2. Political Insecurity and Poor Roads Conditions

Insecurity in WES has in the past and still continues to impose displacement and food insecurity on our citizens. It makes our people unable to produce or to harvest the produce they may have planted at the start of a rainy season, thus creating lack of enough food resources in a state which is the food basket of South Sudan. Insecurity also scares the friends of WES and well-wishers away from investing in developmental activities such as road rehabilitation/construction, supply of medical and educational support services to the citizens in some counties of WES. Poor road conditions also imply that WES farmers cannot take their produce to the markets, or buyers cannot travel to WES counties to purchase food. The condition of some roads connecting our communities is very lamentable to the point that they are impassable. This requires special attention and our collective responsibility at all levels.

3. Tribal Agitation

On a point of regret, we have been following the ethnic tensions that have precipitated particularly in the communities of Tombura. We condemn any ethnic incitements and provocations in the strongest terms possible and we call upon the state government and the peace loving people of Western Equatoria State to get rid of this evil with all its seeds in the midst of a people who have coexisted peacefully for ages. The ethnic communities in WES have intermarried and mixed blood that one cannot isolate and pit one community against the other.

4. The presence of Selecka Militants and Nomadic armed tribesmen (Ambororo)

We are concerned about the activities, movements or deployment of the Seleka, Ambororo and LRA armed men along our borders with neighboring countries of Republic of Central Africa and Democratic Republic of Congo. We are further concerned about the silence and intervention of our state and national governments on these foreign deployment of armed men along our state borders.

5. National Building and Social Services

There is a general feeling of anxiety and desperation about life among ordinary citizens particularly the young people as their aspirations, dreams, ambitions in life cannot be fulfilled in the current atmosphere of COVID- 19 pandemic, economic crisis, unemployment, financial constraints and the lack of role models to look up to and emulate.

Mindful of the aforementioned, we would like to appeal directly to the following concerned individuals and institutions:

Appeals:

1. Government of National Unity

We urge the National Government to speed the full implementation of the Revitalized Peace Agreement in order to restore peace, stability, and unity to the country and to WES in particular. We also implore our national government to investigate and respond urgently to the movements and activities of foreign armed men along the borders of CAR and DRC. To ensure stability, peace and good governance, we recommend that the parties should make compromise and build trust so that full state governments are formed urgently. This will help build confidence in the people of their government and facilitate the provision of services to the communities. It is now three months since the state governors were appointed but they continue to administer the states as single players on the stage.

2. State Government of WES,

We welcome you Hon. Governor Alfred Futuyo as we acknowledge your already active roles as Governor of WES. While we still await the complete formation of the State government, we assure your leadership of our collective support as faith communities, as we urge you to hold fast to the unity of WES. We call upon you to put the unity and interest of the people of WES before political and personal interests. We equally appeal to your leadership to address the rising insecurity in WES, inform the citizens of WES about the mobilization of various armed group around our borders and how our state government plans to handle them. The silence on this matter from our state government has imposed fear on the citizens along those borders. We also call upon the state authority to make use of the existing legal measures of state government to address issues arising.

3. Former WES officials

We call upon WES former government officials to put their personal interest aside and work hand in hand with all the people of WES to restore peace and unity among our people.

4. WES politicians

In the same vein, we call upon WES politicians based in Juba and across the country to promote the unity of the people of WES and not to divide and destabilize our citizens.

5. The diaspora communities

Our brothers and sisters in diaspora are the country's greatest and skillful human capital potentials. We therefore appeal to their good conscience to solicit all kinds of support to assist our nation to achieve good governance, reconciliation, stability, peace and the unity of the people of South Sudan.

6. Young people

Youth are the corner stone of our nation. We appeal to the youth of WES in the State, in the country and those overseas, not to listen to or follow leaders whose voices promote hatred, division and tribalism. Our young people both outside and within the country are the most apt category in the use of social media. We urge you to use the media to build and not to tear the country apart. We have noted with concern the amount of intimidation, incitement, falsehood that South Sudanese feed into the social media.

7. Organized forces

To our men and women in uniform, we earnestly plead with you to adhere to your constitutional responsibility; to protect and safeguard our national interest, to enforce stability by protecting peace in our country. We further urge you not to work for or to protect tribal interests, but rather abide by your national mandate to protect the people and safeguard the territorial integrity of South Sudan.

8. Special plea to WES citizens to embrace unity

As Western Equatoria reverts to one state, we call upon all citizens of this great region to come together and work for the development of the state. Let us not dwell on the past but channel our energies to construct the present as we look to the future with confidence.

9. Non-Governmental Organizations and development partners

We thank and appreciate the roles played by our development partners, International bodies, non-governmental organizations and Civil Societies organizations working in WES. You have been with us during our struggles for independence and after the formation of the government of South Sudan. You have stood with us in all our ups and downs, thank you. At this time, we also

plead with you to not succumb to the donor fatigue tendency but continue to support humanitarian and developmental programs that mitigate human misery and conflicts, and not to take sides or be part of the conflict in WES. We expect you to be impartial and to be part and parcel of the solution and not the problem.

Exhortation to our faith communities

We acknowledge that we are living at a time when our faith in God is put into trial and our people are more in need of sustainable livelihood, physical security, tribal coexistence, reconciliation, peace and unity. We encourage you to be prayerful, continue being resilient, impartial, unwavering in your standing with the truth and in speaking on behalf of the people of God.

The phenomenon of ethnic tensions among us does not only embarrass us all and put us in awkward position, but it threatens to wreck a disaster about which posterity will charge us liable, if we don't bring it to an immediate end. As believers in God, we pride in our God-given diversities as people who have been given life and endowed with this beautiful land and all it contains. We cannot therefore sit and watch the devastation of this divine arrangement right before our eyes. Despite our human failings we strive to make our churches and mosques lived testimonies to the beauty of peaceful coexistence of our people.

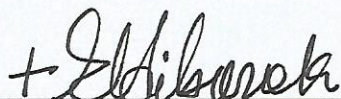
With our experience and the nature of services we offer to the communities at all levels, we feel it incumbent on us to participate and even take lead in the initiatives that can restore unity and peace in the communities across WES and South Sudan at large. We therefore avail ourselves with open hands to support the government and all stakeholders in finding lasting solution to this problem which is a concern to us all. We are resolved to intensify our efforts in this direction while being faithful to our call, true nature and mission in the sight of God and as witnesses before all men and women.

As we pledge our collaboration and support to the State Government and all stakeholders, we pray that the Almighty God who directs the course of history continues to guide and bless us in all we do.

To conclude this message, we earnestly call on you dear brothers and sisters to continue to pray for God's intervention in our lives as individuals, families, communities, State and the country. May God illumine our minds and open our hearts to accept and do his will and purpose for us. Let us not weary in prayers. Pray! Pray! Pray!

May God's blessings be upon all of you!

Yours sincerely,



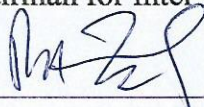
Barani Eduardo Hiiboro Kussala

Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Tombura-Yambio, and Chairperson of Inter Faith Committee




The Most Rev. Samuel Enosa Peni

Archbishop of Western Equatoria Internal Province, Bishop of the Diocese of Yambio and
Chairman for Inter Church Committee



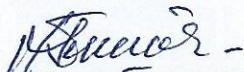
Rt. Rev. Peter Anibati Abia

Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Sudan/Sudan



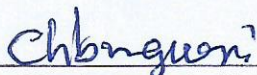
Rev. Elinama Jacob Bisi

Secretary of Inter Faith, WES



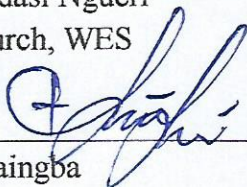
Sheik, Makki Juma Daud

Muslim Community, WES



Rev. Charles Bandasi Ngueri

Africa Inland Church, WES



Rev. Charles Hipaingba

Overseer, Sudan Pentecostal Church, WES

Monday, September 28, 2020, St. Bakhita Spiritual Centre Yambio, WES.