Sudan and South Sudan Catholic Bishops' Conference (SSSCBC)

مؤتمر المطارنة الكاثوليك بالسودان وجنوب السودان

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

Message of the Catholic Bishops of the Ecclesiastical Province of South Sudan

To

The Government and People of South Sudan

On

The Current Political, Social, Security, Economic and Humanitarian Situation in the Republic of South Sudan

"Let justice and peace embrace" (Psalm 85:10)

We the Catholic Bishops of the Ecclesiastical Province of South Sudan gathered in the Annual Ecclesiastical Province Meeting at CRS in Juba July 7th -11th, 2025, under the Theme "Let justice and peace embrace" (Psalm 85:10), prayed and reflected on the current political, social, security, economic and humanitarian situation in our country. This meeting is the first after the passing on of His Holiness Pope Francis, who had South Sudan and its people close to his heart; a passion he demonstrated by his Ecumenical and Apostolic visit to our country even as he was on wheelchair. His legacy of building peace and justice in South Sudan will always remain with us.

We are also meeting for the first time since the election of His Holiness Pope Leo XIV, who succeeded Pope Francis as the Bishop of Rome. We thank God that our country participated in the conclave that elected him through the person of His Eminence, Stephen Ameyu Martin Cardinal Mulla. Thus, we send you greetings and God's blessings from our Mother Church.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We write this message to you with deep sorrow and grave concern about the volatile situation in our beloved country. The past few months of the year 2025 have witnessed a rise in violence and insecurity. This is plunging our people once again into fear, displacement, suffering and hopelessness.

It is with heavy hearts of grief that we are now conveying our dismay about what we have been confronting on daily basis: reports of aerial bombardments and shelling, armed ambushes on

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roads, rivers and highways, military confrontations, shrinking of civic space and media restrictions, deadly clashes at cantonment sites and villages, abductions and rapes, devastating raids at community levels, detentions and alarming hostilities and insecurity across South Sudan. We see communities torn apart, innocent lives lost, people injured, forced recruitment of the infamous gang groups commonly known as *niggers*, and *torontos* and families forced to flee their homes in fear and pain, exacerbated by economic hardships and hunger.

We are now asking and wondering, as shepherds of the people and fellow citizens: How can South Sudan allow itself to return to this unfortunate spiral of conflict and large-scale violence? Have we not suffered enough from the deadly guns and senseless killings in our past bitter experiences? Have we not seen too often how violence has silenced the hopes of our people and crippled peace and development?

Notwithstanding the repeated assurance of the President of the Republic, His Excellency Salva Kiir Mayardit, that he will not take South Sudan back to war and also the declared public statements of opposition leaders that they are committed to implement the peace agreements, we continue to witness lack of concrete steps for peace and reconciliation.

All these are happening because of the lack of the implementation of the security arrangements as stipulated in the Revitalized Peace Agreement of 2018. However, military action is being wrongly embraced instead of genuine dialogue, as a solution to addressing political and social differences. Thus, we ask, our government and opposition leaders: do you really have this country and its people in your hearts or are you only concerned and obsessed with pursuit of power and wealth?

We call for immediate, unimpeded humanitarian access across all conflict zones. This includes establishment of protected corridors for aid delivery, granting tax exemption on humanitarian goods for faith based and humanitarian organizations serving the vulnerable and suffering people of South Sudan.

We urge you to remember the words of our late and beloved Pope Francis during his historic pilgrimage of peace to South Sudan in February 2023, when he pleaded with you, our leaders: *"Brothers and sisters, it is time for peace! ... No more bloodshed, no more conflicts, no more violence and mutual recriminations about who is responsible for it; no more leaving your people athirst for peace … it is time to turn the page."* We equally echo these wise words with urgent insistence to put them into practice so that South Sudan could be seen as a good country among the community of nations. We also would like to remind you of Pope Francis's exhortation in his

Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti, no. 261, "War is a failure of politics and humanity, a shameful capitulation, a stinging defeat before the forces of evil. Let us not remain mired in theoretical discussions but touch the wounded flesh of the victims of war and violence."* In truth, violence is not the solution to the grievances. Violence only leads to ruin. Reject the rhetoric of division, because it only poisons our unity as we now do experience.

As your shepherds, please listen to our plea and exhortation. The ongoing politically motivated violence is not justified; it is a betrayal of your noble calling. Cease from it and prove yourselves to be the legitimate and the true protectors of the people of South Sudan, the guardians of the constitution as the supreme law of the country and the stewards of territorial integrity. As Christians and believers in God, we are called to be witnesses of peace and justice. We urge you to become instruments of reconciliation and healing.

To our priests, religious men and women, and the catechists ministering to the suffering people of our country; do not lose heart! you are called to be living signs of hope. Continue your courageous ministry in our Dioceses. The light of Christ still shines in South Sudan despite the darkness - and we are all bearers of that light.

To our beloved Christians and faithful people of God; stand firm in faith, love and hope. Reject despair, practice forgiveness, and boldly witness to peace in word and deed. Together, let us build a South Sudan where justice, peace and reconciliation triumph.

As we journey through the Jubilee Year of Hope 2025, we recall the words of Pope Leo XIV, addressed to the global community on May 16th at the beginning of his ministry as the Bishop of Rome: *"It is a time of conversion and renewal and, above all, an opportunity to leave conflicts behind and embark on a new path."*

We the Catholic Bishops of South Sudan are honored to witness the 14th Anniversary of the Declaration of the Independence of the Republic of South Sudan as we convene in Juba for our annual meeting. We are happy to reflect on this special day and we congratulate our people for their unwavering determination and resilience in celebrating the independence anniversary with pride and hope, hoisting the flags and singing the national anthem on the streets and at their residential venues.

We pray that all people of goodwill across tribes, faiths, and affiliations, will walk together on this new path, believing again in the promise that peace is possible, and that our land, so rich in resources and potentials, can flourish in justice, freedom, unity and love. Let this Jubilee Year of

Hope be a new dawn for South Sudan. Let it be a time of national conversion and reconciliation, a moment when the guns are totally silenced all over, and the wounds begin to heal among the communities, the politicians and the military and armed groups.

We wholeheartedly acknowledge and commend all those who are committed to and advancing peace in our nation. Your silent efforts and acts of kindness are not unnoticed. They are always blessed by God. As Scripture reminds us, *'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God' (Matthew 5:9).* Please continue with your noble works; South Sudan is moving forward because of you.

May God bless our country South Sudan. May Peace Prevail Now and for Ever. Amen!

Signed

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Rt. Rev. Matthew Remijio Adam, Vice President of SSSCBC & Bishop of Wau ----------

Rt. Rev. Eduardo Hiiboro Kussala, Bishop of Tombura-Yambio ----------

Rt. Rev. Stephen Nyodho Ador, Bishop of Malakal ----------

Rt. Rev. Christian Carlassare, Bishop of Bentiu & Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Rumbek ----------

Rt. Rev. Alex Lodiong Sakor, Bishop of Yei ----------

Rt. Rev. Emmanuel Bernardino Lowi, Bishop of Torit ----------

Rt. Rev. Santo Loku Pio, Auxiliary Bishop of Juba ----------