



South Sudan Catholic Bishops,
Secretariat

SSCBS - Juba

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

South Sudan Catholic Bishops' Secretariat - Pastoral Message

A Call to 'Servant Leadership' in our Nation

Jesus called them to him and said, 'You know that among the gentiles the rulers lord it over them, and great men make their authority felt. Among you this is not to happen. No; anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant, and anyone who wants to be first among you must be your slave, just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.' (Matthew 20:25-28)

Preamble

We the Catholic bishops of South Sudan, meeting in Juba on 14th and 15th September 2021 in the presence of the Apostolic Nuncio Archbishop Bert van Megen and the Charge d'Affaires Mgr Ionut Paul Strejac, send our greetings and blessings to the leaders and people of South Sudan as we meet to pray and reflect on the 'Signs of the Times' (*Gaudium et spes*, 4) and to discern the way forward for our local church. We wish to encourage all our faithful, and our beloved collaborators, the pastoral agents – priests, religious and laity, both indigenous and missionary. We will be participating fully in the Synodal process initiated by the Holy Father so that the voice of the South Sudanese church will also be heard in the universal church.

We give thanks to God, to our Holy Father Pope Francis, to the Apostolic Nuncio and to the outgoing Charge d'Affaires Mgr Mark Kadima for the appointment of new bishops in South Sudan. For many years we have had several vacant dioceses and this has reduced our capacity to play a full role in our nation and in the ecumenical family of the South Sudan Council of Churches. Our meeting today, long-delayed by COVID-19 precautions, is a sign and a pledge of our desire and our capacity to once again play a major role in bringing justice, peace and sustainability to our beloved nation as servants of the Lord. We have listened to our faithful people, and we offer hope as we take forward their concerns.

We take this opportunity to honour and remember our icon Archbishop Emeritus Paolino Lukudu Loro MCCJ who was called home by his Father in heaven since our last meeting. He was a faithful leader of the church, a strong proponent of the ecumenical family working together, a fearless defender of the poor and oppressed during the years of war and persecution, and he played a major role in the various processes which led to the signing of the CPA and the eventual independence of South Sudan. May his life as a servant of the Lord be an inspiration to us all as we follow in his footsteps and build on the foundations he laid. May his soul and the souls of all the faithful departed rest in peace, amen.

We condemn unreservedly the murder on 16th August 2021 of our two dear Sacred Heart Sisters Mary Daniel Abbud and Regina Roba, and their fellow travellers on the Juba-Nimule road. While we call for forgiveness and reconciliation, we also demand that the killers be identified and held to account. We reject the language of "unknown gunmen"; the local community usually knows who the killers are, but they are allowed to escape with impunity. We reject attempts to use this tragedy

Private Tel: +211 924 000 075 / +211 911 000 075, Office Tel: +211 920 099 912

E-mail:- catholicbishopssecretariat@gmail.com

Private E-mail:- fr.abbud@gmail.com

to derail the peace process. We are also outraged at other attacks on the church and its personnel, particularly the shooting of Bishop-elect Christian Carlassare in Rumbek. We recall the murder of our dear Sr Dr Veronika in Yei in 2016, the Regional Facilitator of the South Sudan Council of Churches in Malakal, Juliano Ambrose Otwali, killed in November 2020, Jesuit Fr Victor Odhiambo in Rumbek, and other church personnel. Once again we call for forgiveness and reconciliation for these shameful acts but also that those responsible must be held accountable. We condemn also the attacks on church property. We reject intimidation.

Concerns and Recommendations

Indeed it is not only church personnel who are suffering violence. Our country is supposedly at peace, yet many of our citizens face violence on a daily basis. At this very moment people are being killed and displaced around Tombura and the rest of Western Equatoria, and elsewhere. People are still living in fear in UN POC camps. We remind the government of their duty to provide security to the population, but we also urge them not simply to create more violence using the security apparatus. There are reasons why people turn to violence, often because they do not have access to clean water, food, housing, health care, education and other basic services. It is the duty of the government to create an economic environment where these basic needs are available to the people and where ordinary citizens and indeed members of the security services will not be tempted to use violence just to feed themselves and their families. We advise the President to work diligently to improve the economy as he has promised. We wish to stress the issue of land. Peace and justice cannot come while people's land is occupied, whether that be an individual's private land or land belonging to a particular community. We note the lack of infrastructure and institutions in many of the states which contributes to both violence and poverty amongst the people.

We are concerned about the disregard for human life in our nation. People are dying, whether by violence or by neglect, and it seems to be just accepted. We insist that all human life is sacred. The culture of death must be converted to a culture of life where every human being is valued.

We call for nonviolent solutions to all the conflicts, both national and local. Our Holy Father Pope Francis in his 2017 World Day of Peace message "Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace" quotes his predecessor Pope Paul VI, "Peace is the only true direction of human progress – and not the tensions caused by ambitious nationalisms, nor conquests by violence, nor repressions which serve as mainstay for a false civil order" and continues, "Violence is not the cure for our broken world. Countering violence with violence leads at best to forced migrations and enormous suffering, because vast amounts of resources are diverted to military ends and away from the everyday needs of young people, families experiencing hardship, the elderly, the infirm and the great majority of people in our world. At worst, it can lead to the death, physical and spiritual, of many people, if not of all." We call on our leaders, both in government and in opposition, our security forces and our citizens to heed the words of the Holy Father and seek to resolve the conflicts in our land through nonviolent means. "They will hammer their swords into ploughshares and their spears into sickles" (Isaiah 2:4). We insist that our country should never be taken back to war, whether by the government or the opposition.

We were deeply moved by the Holy Father's unexpected gesture of kissing the feet of our political leaders, a true blessing. But we note with sadness that they have not been sufficiently moved by his humble example and so far they have not demonstrated the political will for peace; violence still persists. We pray that they will find it within themselves to take the necessary steps to bring true peace to our suffering people. The scripture readings of last Sunday present us with a model of leadership which is not about power-sharing and violence but is humble and selfless, like the example set by our Holy Father. "I have offered my back to those who struck me, my cheeks to those who plucked my beard; I have not turned my face away from insult and spitting" (Isaiah

50:6) and “he began to teach them that the Son of man was destined to suffer grievously, and to be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and to be put to death, and after three days to rise again... 'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let them renounce themselves and take up their cross and follow me’”(Mark 8: 31, 34).

We call for the R-ARCSS to be fully implemented, and we express our frustration at the slow pace of implementation, but we also note that true peace does not come merely by signing a paper nor sharing power amongst elites. Hearts must be changed and the root causes of conflicts must be addressed. As we informed the President in a recent meeting, the Catholic Church wishes to be more involved in the peace process. We call for an inclusive process, including all actors, even those who did not sign R-ARCSS. We welcome the mediation of the Catholic Sant'Egidio group at the invitation of the Holy Father in Rome in trying to broker an agreement with all parties, both signatories and non-signatories. At the same time we oppose efforts to undermine that process. We believe that the recent splits and defections in the opposition and the adversarial style of politics cause instability and are a threat to peace. We also reconfirm our commitment to our South Sudan Council of Churches' Action Plan for Peace, and we intend once again to take a more active role in it. We recommend the Gospel values of our Catholic Social Teaching, including respect for the dignity of the human person, subsidiarity, solidarity, the common good and the preferential option for the poor, as well as the virtues of charity, temperance and prudence.

We are concerned by the shrinking civic space in our nation. We call for freedom of the press, freedom of expression, freedom of speech and assembly, so that all voices might be heard. Our leaders must listen to the voices of the people as expressed in the National Dialogue and through Church, civil society and traditional leadership, and especially youth and women.

We pray for all those who have died or suffered from COVID-19, and we have already produced a prayer which our people are saying at every mass. We urge people not to be misled by “fake news” and rumours about the effectiveness of vaccines. We align ourselves with the Holy Father and many other Catholic bishops' conferences in advising everyone to receive the vaccination and to take sensible precautions such as wearing masks and maintaining social distancing. We recall the recent words of the Holy Father that getting vaccinated is “an act of love... a simple but profound way of promoting the common good and caring for each other, especially the most vulnerable” and we thank Pope Francis and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI for setting a public example of vaccination. Our Catholic Social Teaching calls us to work for the common good, and we all have a responsibility to protect not only ourselves but others.

As South Sudan experiences floods, environmental pollution, deforestation and the decline of wildlife, we recall that care of creation is another of the values of Catholic Social Teaching. As the entire world faces climate change of crisis proportions, we call on our government and citizens to protect and nurture God's creation.

We are saddened by the humanitarian situation in South Sudan. As well as the floods, millions of people are suffering from hunger. Refugees and IDPs need resources as they return home in some areas, while elsewhere others are still being displaced. We thank our Caritas agencies and the international community for their assistance, but we also urge them to increase their support.

Blessing

We pray that all in positions of leadership, whether in the government, the opposition, the security organs, civil society and indeed the church, will remember that leadership is not about sharing power but about service to God and to our fellow human beings. We pray for all of you during these difficult times. We wish to encourage all our faithful and all people of good will, especially our

ecumenical and inter-faith sisters and brothers, to be strong in faith and hope and to continue working for justice and peace. May God bless you all.

Given in Juba this fifteenth day of September 2021.

+ *[Handwritten signature]*

H.G. ARCHBISHOP STEPHEN AMEYU,
ARCHBISHOP OF JUBA, CHAIRMAN, SSCBS
JUBA

+ *[Handwritten signature]*

HIS LORDSHIP BISHOP ERKOLANO LODU TOMBE
CATHOLIC BISHOP OF YEI DIOCESE.

+ *[Handwritten signature]*

HIS LORDSHIP EDUARDO HIIBORO KUSSALA
CATHOLIC BISHOP OF TUMBURA YAMBIO DIOCESE.

+ *[Handwritten signature]*

HIS LORDSHIP BISHOP STEPHEN NYODHO ADOR
CATHOLIC BISHOP OF MALAKAL DIOCESE.

+ *[Handwritten signature]*

HIS LORDSHIP MATTEW REMIJIO ADAM, MCCJ
CATHOLIC BISHOP OF DIOCESE OF WAU.

+ *[Handwritten signature]*

H.L. BISHOP SANTO LOKU PIO
AUXILIARY BISHOP OF JUBA ARCHDIOCESE
JUBA.

