

AFRECS E-Blast: October 23, 2013

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In the church:

A TIME TO LEARN, REFLECT AND PREPARE – THE AFRECS CONFERENCE: A Message from AFRECS Executive Director Richard Parkins

A powerful message greeted me as I entered the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial this evening accompanied by two bishops of the Episcopal Church of Sudan (ECS) who had joined me in Washington for three days of advocacy on behalf of peace and reconciliation in South Sudan, and peace and relief for the people of the Nuba Mountains. The inscription which read “Out of this mountain of despair comes a stone of hope” somehow seemed an apt summary of my feelings about the national AFRECS conference held last week at the St James Commons in Chicago.

This gathering allowed about 60 dedicated friends of the ECS to extend their education of opportunities and difficulties facing people in both Sudans – a task that was ably tackled by experts who reminded us that the history of both nations helps predict the challenges ahead if both peacemaking and development are to become realistic goals. Bishop Anthony Poggo of the Diocese of Kajo-Keji, who is a spokesperson for the ECS, set forth the long journey taken by South Sudan with the Church as its partner to the independence that the nation now enjoys. Brian D’Silva, a well-recognized expert on both Sudans, unpacked with amazing clarity the complex history leading to the current state of affairs in both countries. Interspersed through this two-day event were accounts of what American partners had achieved in companion connections with ECS friends, the objective of which was to encourage others to accept the possibility of entering into a partnership with an ECS diocese. To dispel the hesitancy that often inhibits the risk taking that reaching out in partnership with a Sudanese diocese often entails, Buck Blanchard, a leader in global mission for the diocese of Virginia, reminded the group that risk taking is an imperative of true Christian ministry.

The conference brought forward areas where developments were happening and where plans were underway for moving forward. A thoughtful presentation on the longer-term possibilities of higher education in South Sudan was offered by Dr. Eeva John, a prominent theologian from the Church of England, followed by a listing of activities at Bishop Gwynne College, where theological education was being upgraded to anticipate the demands upon clergy as they were trained for a future in a new nation. Episcopal Relief and Development (ERD), while noting its work in South Sudan, particularly its national health initiative, also challenged the ECS to invest in a competent, well-managed operation that could receive and effectively manage resources.

Possibly one of the most captivating portions of the conference centered around compelling presentations of the heart-wrenching suffering that plagues South Kordofan, Blue Nile, Abyei and Darfur, as well as the painful internal strife that persists in Jonglei. Conferees were moved by graphic illustrations of the devastation in the Nuba Mountains incorporated into the commentaries of Bishop Andudu, of the Diocese of Kadugli and South Kordofan, and Gutti Kangam, who coordinates US-based Christian and Muslim Nuba youth devoted to raising the awareness of American audiences to the anguish of their people.

All of this would have been of less importance if it had not been buttressed by a clear call to advocacy with a well-explained tool kit offered to prospective advocates. As a further endorsement of advocacy, Ambassador Dane Smith, who experienced being the recipient of advocacy when serving as the Special Envoy's key person on Darfur, made clear that to public policy makers, advocacy matters.

As conferees celebrated a joyous service of Holy Eucharist on the concluding Sunday of the conference, heard an inspiring sermon by AFRECS president Bishop David Jones, and participated in a beautiful liturgy with wonderful music, all hopefully emerged feeling better prepared as partners and advocates for the people of South Sudan and Sudan.

Richard Parkins

Videos from the AFRECS Conference

Episcopal News Service has [extensive written and video coverage](#) of the conference.

Following TEC Missionaries Working with the ECS

Ellen Hanckel has a [new blog post](#), which paints a vivid picture of the solemn fixing of the cross on the grave of Bishop Gwynne College's former principal, Joseph Taban.

Joining Ellen on the list of friends from abroad who have spent significant time working in, for, and alongside the ECS is **Noah Hillerbrand**, a recent Chicago-area high school graduate who travels this month to Renk, where he will focus on being present in the diocese for six months as well as carrying out a fence project. You can [sign up on his website](#) to follow his experience and progress on the fence as he gets a blog and/or Twitter and Facebook presences set up.

Archbishop Daniel's Visit to South Africa

Archbishop Daniel Deng Bul wrote an [article](#) for Anglican News Service about his visit to South Africa.

In politics -- the two Sudans and beyond:

Africa and the International Criminal Court

Recently the African Union entertained the question of whether African nations should withdraw from the ICC. Archbishop Desmond Tutu [spoke out](#) against such a move, and the AU, while urging that the ICC not prosecute any sitting head of state and that it defer the trial of the Kenyan President slated for November, [did not find sufficient support](#) to withdraw.

Abyei

It seems that the scheduled (by some) October referendum on Abyei will probably not occur. Significant disagreements about the details of the referendum remain, and Sudan did not agree to the October date. Both the UN and South Sudan have pulled back from insisting that the referendum occur now, while continuing to urge forward movement toward it. However, local Ngok Dinka residents seem to be moving ahead with [plans](#) for a referendum this month. Luka Biong Deng has an [article](#) that explains it all in the *Sudan Tribune*. While the prediction of most is that Khartoum will reject the results of such a referendum, it is expected to be a useful lobbying tool.

The Satellite Sentinel Project

The Satellite Sentinel Project published a [warning](#) yesterday that Sudan is staging military assets in a way that suggests they are planning a new campaign of aerial bombardment in South Kordofan or the Abyei area. The report includes a link to their satellite images.

Presidential Summit

President Omar Al-Bashir of Sudan traveled to Juba this week to meet with President Salva Kiir of South Sudan. The two met yesterday but [did not announce the hoped-for agreement](#) on the Abyei referendum. However, they made progress on implementation of a [safe demilitarized zone](#).

Deep Analysis of the Sudans' Relationship: Princeton Lyman

Former US special envoy to Sudan and South Sudan Ambassador Princeton Lyman has a [long post](#) for CNN's GPS blog detailing the problems in Sudan and South Sudan and urging the two nations to stop pursuing their failing tactics and find ways to address their internal issues.

Lessons on Development

Although not specifically focused on the Sudans, an [article](#) from the *Stanford Social Innovation Review* looks at lessons learned from large-scale water development projects that may be useful to people working on development projects in the region.

In politics -- South Sudan:

More Violence in Jonglei State

The UN has condemned (and [described](#)) attacks Sunday in Jonglei state, which [Voice of America](#) also details. The US [Ambassador](#) to South Sudan also condemned the attacks.

Failed State?

The Sudd Institute finds inclusion of the Republic of South Sudan in the Failed State Index (FSI) [fallacious](#).

Tourism in South Sudan

A [guidebook](#) for South Sudan is now available. NPR picked up the story.

In politics -- Sudan:

The Recent Protests

According to Voice of America, the US special envoy to the Sudans, Donald Booth, has noted that [what Sudan spends on its various wars](#) is equivalent to what it was spending on fuel subsidies, the end to which sparked the recent protests in Khartoum and other Sudanese cities. Alex de Waal has an [article](#) entitled "Making Sense of the Protests," and Eric Reeves' has a [critique](#) of de Waal's thinking.

The Nuba Mountains

Radio Dabanga reports [bombing](#) of villages by SAF Antonovs, according to an SPLM-N spokesperson, in the Nuba Mountains yesterday, 10/21. The Sudan Consortium has a [report](#) on the bombings that occurred there (i.e., in South Kordofan) in September.

Darfur

Every day several incidents perpetrated by different agents are reported in Darfur. To follow events in that troubled region, bookmark [Radio Dabanga's website](#). To complicate things there, the UN Panel of Experts on Sudan says that the energy company Petronas, a heavy investor in Canada, is [violating the UN arms embargo](#) by supplying fuel to military planes in Darfur.

Refugees in Sudan

Sudan has announced a [decision](#) to grant work permits to refugees in the eastern part of the country, 80,000 of whom are Eritreans, who have been arriving (and staying) for many years and continue at the rate of 400-600 per month.

Bashir on Hajj

President Omar Al-Bashir of Sudan recently traveled to Saudi Arabia for the annual [pilgrimage](#) to Mecca.

Darfur

The AU released a [communiqué](#) last week on the current situation in Darfur. Both [the US Department of State](#) and [the AU](#) have condemned attacks on UN peacekeepers in Darfur, especially the killing of three from Senegal and one from Zambia in the past couple of weeks.

PRAY: Pray for that the advocacy work of ECS Bishops Poggo and Andudu and AFRECS Executive Director Richard Parkins may bear fruit. Pray for all in harm's way in Sudan and South Sudan, especially for refugees, internally displaced persons, and all the people of Blue Nile, South Kordofan, Darfur, and Jonglei states.