

AFRECS E-Blast: November 19, 2014

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Message from AFRECS Executive Director, Richard Parkins

While participating in a consultation with ECSS&S colleagues who comprise the provincial Justice, Peace and Reconciliation Commission, I joined other colleagues in visiting two camps housing those internally displaced by the conflict in South Sudan which started nearly a year ago. IDP camps are pretty horrible places, in part because they are suddenly and hastily erected. In addition, they are obliged to house and extend protection for people who arrive traumatized, bringing little if anything with them but the clothes on their backs.

Having been in refugee work for many years, visiting camps is not a new experience, but it is always a haunting one. There are few reminders of the terrible consequences of war that are as stark and painful as an IDP camp. One could dwell on that but in so doing, we run the risk of missing a more positive story that can emerge from these visits. Obviously, positive is a relative term when it comes to the misery facing displaced people. Nevertheless, there are some good news incidents that can emerge even in places where pain and suffering abound. To witness the resilience and faith of those whose lives have been violently changed by war is an amazing experience.

In the Nimule camp near the Ugandan border, we were introduced to women who were managing a micro agricultural project with the help of a local NGO and Christian Aid (UK). The project was beginning to be a reliable source of food for their families and allowed them to make a bit of money by marketing their surplus produce. While this in itself deserves applause, what was equally impressive was the ability of these women to organize themselves and to address to their sponsors about a need for a more timely provision of seeds and a supply of water through irrigation that would permit an expansion of their efforts even in the dry season. These women, mostly widows, were planning a future for themselves whether in their new location or back in Bor - the home from which they fled. As they serenaded us with robust dancing while carrying hoes, spades, and scythes, we were visibly reminded that their spirits had not been crushed and that they would overcome the evil that had been done them.

In another camp near Juba, we were also greeted by a large group of women, mostly widows, whose strong singing made us certain that we were being welcomed as Christian friends who had come to hear their story. Here we learned from pastors that those who took revenge on them robbed them of everything including their Bibles. The pastors in the group were sharing one clergy collar among them - letting us know that there was still a vital identifiable clergy

presence in the camp. The residents had a spokesperson who helped nurture a sense of community within the group by attempting to give the youngsters the semblance of a school, and even by erecting a makeshift clinic that could do little except offer those in need of care a bit of comfort and prayers. Again we met persons who were able to salvage enough energy and sense of self so that they could create a life for themselves, even while they bemoaned their loss and lamented their virtual isolation from the rest of the world.

It would be wrong to romanticize any of this. It is important, however, to acknowledge the ferocity of the human spirit - often nurtured by faith - that continues to assert itself in these dark places. These people (Dinka in one camp; Nuer in another), by confronting us with their stories, challenge the indifference that we might show as war and conflict become so pervasive. Their struggle to survive and move forward increases our determination to be peacemakers in a war weary world. Their embrace of our visit speaks of a graciousness that, if allowed to flourish, could make a positive difference.

Faithfully,
Richard Parkins

South Sudan

"South Sudan President holds reconciliation talks with Garang's widow" as [reported in the Sudan Tribune](#) on November 17th. The talks took place in Kampala, Uganda, one week ahead of resumption of peace talks in Ethiopia.

The [South Sudan News Agency released a statement](#) on November 9th from 23 South Sudanese civil society organizations which argues that the National Security Bill, 2014 violates the Transitional Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan on substantive and procedural grounds. The statement calls on the Government of South Sudan to restart the law-making process to allow for greater public input on the Bill.

"If this bill is signed into law," the conclusion of the statement reads, "South Sudan will be one step closer to recreating the oppressive security apparatus that the South Sudan people are all too familiar with from our time spent under the Sudanese state. ... We therefore request that the President withhold assent...and return it to parliament. The legislative process should be started anew...to create a piece of legislation that will stand the test of time."

On November 10th, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) [released a new report](#) on the deteriorating conditions in South Sudan. The report provides on-the-ground evidence and

urgent recommendations to help save lives. David Miliband, IRC president and CEO, said, "Yet again we are seeing a man-made humanitarian catastrophe where the most vulnerable are bearing the brunt of a neglected political crisis. With other global crises seizing media attention, and the narrow avoidance of famine this year, policy-makers must not allow the South Sudan emergency to drift into the 'too difficult box.' The civilian population is systematically targeted with unspeakable abuse and violence while the threat of starvation still hangs over the head of the world's youngest nation." See [full report](#) here.

On the other hand, [Postcard of peace and forgiveness from 'Small London'](#), a recent Sudan Tribune opinion piece gives a more hopeful view. Reporting from a peace and reconciliation conference held in Yei, (South Sudan) the Rev. Bernard Oliya Suwa, PhD writes, "If ever there was evidence of God's ability to triumph over man-made evil, then this was it! Convinced by this sacred belief, quietly, I prayed to God to bring healing and reconciliation amongst us who had gathered in Yei. I prayed too, that the spirit of sisterhood, of brotherhood, of forgiveness, and of reconciliation that was so powerfully displayed in Yei, be carried by angels and spread across the length and breadth of our traumatized land."

"While in Yei," the author continues, "we had taken a bold step towards peace together. We sat together and listened to each other's painful stories. We opened dialogue with each other. And we proved to ourselves, and to all our brothers and sisters across South Sudan, that although we are from different tribes, we are in fact one nation – all children of God, made in the image of God. If God loves us all, then why should we hate each other? If God can forgive us for our gross transgressions against Him, then why can't we forgive each other?"

In conclusion, the author encourages others in his country with these words: "Through this article, I present myself before you as a humble and ordinary South Sudanese. My voice is not any louder than yours – but I am using it to call for peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation amongst ourselves. Use your voice. Stand up in the name of God almighty and denounce the forces that want to divide us, and set us against each other. Let peace and freedom reign supreme in our motherland – because you are worth it!"

["South Sudan: Snapshots of a Divided Country."](#) AllAfrica recently posted this in-depth article about the three areas of South Sudan as it currently exists. Written by James Copnall, journalist, author and editor of material about the country, it is very thoroughly researched and well worth reading.

Sudan:

"Sudan denies U.N. access to Darfur village to check rape accusations," as [reported by Reuter's](#) on November 17th. "Sudan is skeptical about the motives behind the mission's insistence on a second visit to the Tabit area," the (Sudan) foreign ministry said.

The United Nations issued a statement on Monday saying that Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon was concerned about the fact that UNAMID was again denied access to Tabit. "Only a full investigation by UNAMID will help shed light over these serious allegations," it said. "The Secretary-General therefore urges the Government of Sudan to grant UNAMID unfettered access, without further delay, to Tabit and its population so that these (rape) reports can be verified."

Last month, an internal U.N. review found that UNAMID had failed to provide U.N. headquarters in New York with full reports on attacks against civilians and peacekeepers. The review had been ordered in response to media reports alleging that UNAMID intentionally covered up details of deadly attacks.

Law and order have collapsed in much of Darfur, where mainly non-Arab rebels took up arms in 2003 against the Arab-led government in Khartoum, accusing it of discriminating against them. UNAMID has been deployed in the region since 2007.

A press release from the U. N. Secretary-General on October 29th reads, in part: "A review, initiated by the Secretary-General, was conducted into recent allegations that the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) intentionally sought to cover up crimes against civilians and peacekeepers."

Although "(t)he Review Team did not find any evidence to support those allegations ... it did find a tendency to under-report unless absolutely certain of the facts." ... "The Review Team also found that the mission took an unduly conservative approach to the media, maintaining silence when it could have developed a press line, even in the absence of all the facts."

"The Secretary-General is deeply troubled by those findings. He recognizes that UNAMID faces unique challenges owing to its complex mandate and operating environment. Nevertheless, keeping silent or under-reporting on incidents involving human rights violations and threats or attacks on United Nations peacekeepers cannot be condoned under any circumstances. The Secretary-General will take all necessary steps to ensure full and accurate reporting by UNAMID..." [Read full press release here.](#) under the title of "Deeply Troubled by Review of Hybrid Peacekeeping Operation in Darfur, Secretary-General Urges Transparency, Timely Reporting."

Meanwhile, on the same topic, [Foreign Policy](#) published an article by its staff writer, Colum Lynch, entitled "U.N. Whistleblower Decries 'Cover-Up of a Cover-Up' Over Darfur Debacle" which reads, in part:

"Human rights advocates said the release of the report should underscore the need for U.N. peacekeepers to take their jobs as watchdogs far more seriously -- and not to silence themselves because of fears of possible repercussions."

"Whether or not you call it a cover-up, the report reveals a shocking failure to report on attacks on civilians, always it seems to the benefit of the government," said Philippe Boloipon, Human Rights Watch's U.N. representative. "This report should be a wake-up call to other U.N. missions, whether in Mali, CAR [the Central African Republic], Libya, or South Sudan, that proactive and transparent reporting on human rights violations, regardless of the perpetrators, is a core function of the mission, and one that the U.N. Secretary-General expects them to perform diligently."

"Aicha Elbasri is a U.N. whistleblower who first brought the scandal to light by providing Foreign Policy with thousands of pages of internal U.N. documents detailing the mission's suppression of evidence of crimes by Sudanese soldiers and their proxies, including the murder of blue helmets. She denounced the U.N. findings as "an exercise in damage control."

"But Elbasri said she will keep pressing for U.N. officials to be held to account for their failings in Darfur. "What pushed me to resign my post and sacrifice my career and sole income isn't just the U.N.-admitted 'underreporting' and 'silence' of UNAMID," she said. "It is what the former chief of UNAMID, Ms. Aichatou Mindaoudou, had rightly described as a deliberate manipulation of all UNAMID reporting by two or three officials to serve some hidden agendas."

"I stand by the charges I am pressing against both UNAMID and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations," she added. "And I challenge the U.N. to establish an independent and public inquiry for the sake of the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

Thank you to our readers for your interest, your prayers, and your support.
Ellen J. Hanckel
Editor

Requests from the AFRECS Treasurer, Christy Hollywood

Renew your membership online at <http://www.afreecs.org/getInvolved.htm>.

Make an additional donation to support the Episcopal Church in South Sudan and Sudan's efforts to provide solace and encourage reconciliation.

Encourage others to support AFRECS as well.

PRAY FOR PEACE AND DEEP HEALING OF THE CONFLICTS AND RIVALRIES IN SOUTH SUDAN.

PARTNER, URGE, GIVE

If you'd like to be doing more to help address the crisis in South Sudan, please consider the following:

* If you have contacts in South Sudan and are able to get news of various parts of the country and the church from them, keep AFRECS in the loop by replying to this email or using our main contact email address: info@afreecs.org.

* Pay attention to the evolving events and be prepared to advocate for peacemaking with the US (or other) government, especially if attention to conflict resolution wanes.

* Give to provide relief for internally displaced persons and others whose resources are compromised by the fighting and instability. One hundred percent of [donations to AFRECS](#) go to ECSS&S entities that can provide direct help to the people most in need.