

AFRECS E-Blast: March 11, 2015

PRAY. TEACH. PARTNER. URGE. GIVE.

Another Lenten Commitment

Message from AFRECS Executive Director

Dear Friends,

As I write this message, two pieces of information cross my screen. **One is a thoughtful analysis from the Sudd Institute** which points out how tribal and regional differences expressed through South Sudan's elite political structure continue to frustrate South Sudan's ability to develop an effective, honest, and responsive government. **The other is news that, yet again, the warring factions have failed to reach a peace agreement in the current conflict.** The first speaks of an endemic problem. If not addressed, it condemns South Sudan to a perilous future. The second imposes further suffering and despair upon the people. Their future becomes more bleak as the conflict continues. **Once more, the Church and the faith community face a daunting challenge. Our continuing prayers and support are needed.**

The Sudd Institute article (South Sudan's National Identity Challenge March 1, 2015) notes that South Sudanese retreat to their tribal identity as a dominant force in their lives because they have been failed by their government and political elites. They have witnessed their government fostering and perpetuating a fierce adherence to tribal and regional identity in allocating power and resources at the expense of other considerations, such as merit. This dysfunctional approach prompts the same norms to prevail in the larger society. An alternative to this is to set forth a message that declares tribalism to be a sinful act. As it is widely practiced in South Sudan, it is a behavior to be eliminated or at least downgraded from the dominant expression of individual identity. If this message is set forth as vigorously as possible, the result could be a personal identity informed by the Gospel message of love, inclusion, and peace. This message should be accompanied by a hearty condemnation of all that inhibits **the fullest expression of God's desire: that God's children live in peace with one another. What other institution can deliver this counter message but the Church?**

Lent is a time in our liturgical year when we look critically at our behavior and seek ways of removing those forces which inhibit us from fully embracing God's mandate to love one another as Christ loves us. If individuals are asked to critically examine their behavior in light of God's commandments, should not the Church, and in this case the Churches of South Sudan, do the same? These more problematic identities are frustrating national solidarity. Even if they are not expressly promoted, have all possible efforts been made to show how their cultural dominance has worked against God's commandment to love one another? **What would it mean if members of the Church became zealous advocates of a new form of behavior where**

love, peace and forgiveness become the dominant themes? This could happen only if the Church vigorously inculcates this message

As we extol the role of the Church as civil society's major institution, should we not encourage our brothers and sisters in faith to see where they have failed to preach against tribalism and forms of identity that do not embrace Christ's message? Whether this is done by design or neglect, the Gospel message is still subverted. Put another way, If those identities which inhibit a sense of national unity are not explicitly promoted, but are observed, nevertheless, the Gospel message is still subverted. **The Gospel mandate is one of inclusion, forgiveness and peace. Practices and behavior which run counter to these should be cited as wrong and labeled as such.** The Church is expected to avoid any suggestion that it rewards identities that inhibit the most robust embrace of what Christ preached as he encountered dysfunctional behavior during his own ministry. **In so doing, the Church's credibility as a vehicle of peace and reconciliation becomes more convincing.**

If, as noted by the Sudd Institute, the abuse of regional and tribal identities has become so entrenched in South Sudan as to allow the current conflict to take hold so quickly and brutally, is not the Church the institution best positioned to take on the task of reversing this deep rooted tendency? **Indeed, the Gospel message of inclusion, love and forgiveness is that counter message. What can friends and partners do to support the Church in taking on this daunting challenge?**

We have frequently called upon the Church to play an expanding and vital role in the future of South Sudan. We do this recognizing the enormity of what is required, realizing that our fervent prayers and steadfast support are urgently needed. **It would be unfair to expect more of the Church without expecting more of ourselves as friends and partners.**

Let this be another commitment during this Lenten season.

Faithfully,

Richard Parkins

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South Sudan

The article, referenced above, is published by The Sudd Institute, "an independent research organization that conducts and facilitates policy relevant research and training". Its purpose is

"to inform public policy and practice, to create opportunities for discussion and debate, and to improve analytical capacity in South Sudan." Its intention is "to significantly improve the quality, impact, and accountability of local, national, and international policy- and decision-making in South Sudan in order to promote a more peaceful, just and prosperous society."

The author is Abraham A. Awolich, a founding member of the Sudd Institute who currently runs the administration and finance department. He is a policy analyst whose research interests include public administration, community development, organizational justice and all poverty related issues.

[The entire article](#) is well worth reading in full.

The conclusion and recommendations are copied here below:

"This paper has argued that although South Sudan at independence inherited a formed national identity, it has been fragile. This fragility has worsened as a result of elite's competition for power and resources. The crisis, which is eroding the South Sudanese social fabric, is partly a result of elite's failure to embark on meaningful social transformation, both to consolidate national unity (identity) and to provide qualitative improvement in people's economic lives, given that the elites had all the resources and political freedom to change the society. The current South Sudanese social structure and the multiplicity of identities present a daunting challenge for building national cohesion. This situation is exacerbated by ethnicization of politics and the adoption of incoherent government structures that are divorced from the reality of the society. What is more, the elite have failed to deliver on the promises of the new state and their involvement in the state looting schemes essentially disillusioned the South Sudanese, so they have retreated to their tribal circles. Tribal or ethnic identity, which is subject to elite's manipulation, poses a serious challenge to building a solid national identity.

To end ethnic manipulation and resolve the multiplicity of identity problem, the following measures are recommended.

- The country needs to embark on a deliberative social transformation exercise by building a pluralistic political society. This process should include reforming power institutions such as the political parties, military, judiciary and intelligence agencies as well as reconstituting the state through a broad based consensus.
- Political contests should be given serious consideration in terms of reforms to avoid a recurrence of December 15, 2013 violence.
- The institution of traditional authority should be reviewed, reinvigorated and recognized as an important element in building a more stable and cohesive society.

- The link between the central government and the local government must be intelligibly crafted in order to eliminate arbitrary and redundant institutions and to remove the unwarranted duality between traditional authority and modern state authority.
- Should the nation decide to adopt full pledged federalism, states and regions should be eliminated as redundant, and the next tier of the federal units be much closer to people.
- To regain its legitimacy, the government should draw a new economic strategy that ensures fair distribution and redistribution of resources. A perceived fairness in resource distribution is one key instrument for building a cohesive society and promoting peaceful coexistence.
- South Sudan has to learn about the dangers of an elite-centric economic policy. Corruption kills nations and so new, robust anti-corruption efforts should be exerted, and mechanisms to successfully wage this campaign enshrined in all government institutions. Corruption must be treated as a national security issue that needs serious confrontation.
- Lastly, education is an important sector through which social transformation can be achieved. South Sudan needs to embark on a well-thought out educational program both to transform the society and to bring about social cohesion and economic prosperity.
- The country's political class needs to invest resources, political will and establish a clear constitutional requirement for the development of the national identity, through a variety of programs spanning the sports, national youth service, a national language policy an a national civil service that moves officials across the country regardless of their birth states."

[What next after the final South Sudan Peace Talks?](#) This comment & analysis article published in the Sudan Tribune is written by Luka Biong Deng, the Director, Centre for Peace and Development Studies, University of Juba, Global Fellow, Peace Research Institute Oslo, and Associate Fellow, Carr Centre for Human Rights Policy at Harvard Kennedy School.

Thank you to our readers for your interest, your prayers, and your support.

We invite you to visit our [Website: http://www.afrecs.org/](http://www.afrecs.org/)

Ellen J. Hanckel

Editor

PRAY. TEACH. PARTNER. URGE. GIVE. LEARN.

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

***Pray for peace and deep healing** of the conflicts and rivalries in South Sudan.

***Join AFRECS** or renew your annual membership on line at <http://www.afreecs.org/getInvolved.htm>

* 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.

* Be prepared to **advocate** for peacemaking with the US (or other) government, especially if attention to conflict resolution wanes.

***Donate** to support the Episcopal Church in South Sudan and Sudan's efforts to provide solace and encourage reconciliation.

***Urge others** to support [AFRECS](#) as well.
