

AFRECS E-Blast: March 26, 2014

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A message from AFRECS Executive Director, Richard Parkins:

AN EXPRESSION OF SOLIDARITY

Each Friday, a dozen or more friends of the Episcopal Church of South Sudan and Sudan (ECSSS) gather by conference call to update themselves on the current crisis in South Sudan.

We express solidarity with our sisters and brothers as they endure the ravages of civil conflict. We walk with them as they seek an end to the violence that has so brutally interrupted their journey to a free and safe South Sudan. In a variety of ways, those on the call have links to South Sudan. All have been a part of that nation's journey to a better life. This network of faithful supporters of a better South Sudan include not only American friends but colleagues from England who have strong ties to the ECSSS.

These conversations serve a variety of purposes. Among them are updates on the conditions facing different areas of conflict. If phone connections permit, we receive reports from bishops and church leaders who provide first hand accounts of their people. Many of them have been displaced by conflict. Last week we heard from Bishop Reuben of the Bor diocese who had returned to his diocese to be greeted by untold devastation.

These calls bring together various efforts to bring about peace and reconciliation. Our prayer is that circumstances will permit a real peace to take hold. We have learned about a project in the Kakuma camp in Kenya where pastors from different ethnic groups will be trained in peace and healing techniques. We know of efforts to form peace institutes in the Bishop Gwynne and Renk colleges of theology - where pastors and lay leaders will be trained as catalysts for peace and reconciliation throughout South Sudan. We have made each other aware of attempts to raise funds to relieve the suffering of the thousands displaced by the war. We have sent out an appeal for equipping bishops in the most impacted regions so that they can continue their pastoral outreach to their people.

What is most significant about these calls is the message that they convey: that those in South Sudan have not been forgotten. Those who join these calls are determined that war and destruction will not be the ultimate outcome of South Sudan's recent struggle. Our collective voice speaks to the love and compassion that God calls us to express. After all, we are a resurrection people.

Richard Parkins

[Radio Tamazu](#) reported on Monday, **March 24** that a South Sudanese delegation is headed for the negotiations in Addis Ababa after initially boycotting them. It reads in part:

“Well, we’re going,” said the head of delegation, Information Minister Michael Makuei. “The main purpose of our trip is that we reach lasting peace in South Sudan. We’re going with open minds and we’re going so that we can bring peace to South Sudan,”

IGAD, the East African bloc of nations facilitating the peace process, has the financial and political backing of the ‘Troika’ governments of the US, Norway and the United Kingdom, as well as the European Union.

For a review of an East African perspective since the beginning of March, see the following three news articles:

[The East African](#) reported on Saturday, **March 15** that additional divisions jeopardize 'make-or-break' Juba peace talks. Summary follows:

- *The East African* has learned that mediators of IGAD (Intergovernmental Agency for Development) have convinced some of the Troika countries — the US, UK and Norway — that their initial preference of an interim government could breed more conflict, and are now fine-tuning a plan to work with President Kiir to initiate political reforms.
- The peace road map contains, among other things, proposed reform of the Sudanese People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) structures and management style, a review of the constitution and modalities for the scheduled April 2015 elections, with clear times lines on when they are supposed to be realized.

From the same news outlet, posted on Saturday, **March 8**, we find this story: [Juba's neighbours uneasy as Addis peace talks falter](#). Summary follows:

IGAD special envoys on Monday said there was not much progress being made at the Addis Ababa talks, and rescheduled the discussions for March 20.

Finally, *The East African* posted this news story on Saturday, **March 1**: [Only elections could bring peace](#). Summary follows:

- Both warring parties have ignored the Cessation of Hostilities agreement signed on January 23 and have launched a fresh offensive that could put the election timetable at risk.

- Some supporters of President Salva Kiir have already started supporting suggestions that the term of current government be extended for two years to enable the country to put its house in order.

On Sunday, March 23, the Vatican Radio website posted [this article](#) - an appeal from Pope Francis which urges a stop to violence in South Sudan, in order to ensure access for humanitarian aid and for the promotion of peace. It reads in part:

In a letter addressed to Archbishop Paulino Lukudu Loro of Juba, read at Mass on Sunday morning by Cardinal Peter Turkson, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, who is in South Sudan on a mission to pray with the people there, the Pope entreated all parties involved to “tirelessly seek peaceful solutions, enabling the common good to prevail over particular interests” and decried “the fighting that has cost the lives of many innocent people and caused deep wounds and divisions which will take many years to heal”.

It continued: “We see daily how armed conflicts are generating poverty, hunger, sickness and death, and we cannot remain indifferent to these realities. We are likewise deeply grieved by the dramatic situation of those many men, women and children forced to flee their native lands and live in camps as refugees or exiles, in conditions unworthy of their human dignity and in which they are no longer seen as persons but as nameless statistics”. ... “We know that without peace there can be no development”.

“For this reason the Holy Father addresses a pressing appeal to all parties involved, so that, with the support of the international community, they may put an end to hostilities and acts of violence, (and) ensure access to humanitarian aid for the needy...” ...Pope Francis “urges us to promote the culture of encounter. This means first and foremost, rejecting self-centeredness and insistence on one’s own rights without concern for the rights of others. It means seeing in others, not competitors or, worse still, enemies, but rather brothers and sisters to be accepted and with whom to work.” The letter appeals for “a clear recognition that human beings, with their legitimate moral, ethical, and social aspirations, are always prior to the State and the various powers which might in some way seek to subject them”.

The letter concludes underlining the fact that while condemning every act of violence, the Catholic Church “will remain present and work generously in providing every possible form of assistance, especially for the sake of reestablishing a climate of dialogue, reconciliation and peace among all the members of society”.

Finally, here is the [latest UN OCHA situation report](#), dated Thursday, **March 20**. The concluding sentence from the background summary gives us this haunting reality: “The crisis has led to a serious deterioration in the food security situation and some 3.7 million people are now at high

risk of food insecurity in the coming year."

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

Ellen J. Hanckel, E-Blast Editor

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@afrecs.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.

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