

AFRECS E-Blast: June 12, 2013

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## In the church

A Message from AFRECS Executive Director Richard Parkins

### THE CHURCH AND CIVIL SOCIETY

There are few places in the world, quite possibly, where the faith community is so emphatically called to be the voice of civil society. The Church has special legitimacy with the people of South Sudan, having accompanied them through the travails of a wrenching history. Faithful companions deserve to be trusted and their guidance deserves to be respected. While this awesome responsibility is conferred upon the Church, we must understand the enormity of this role which grows with the increasing number of areas that need the voice of the Church.

Compounding this reality is the realization that the situations requiring the embrace of the Church are complex and likely to resist change defiantly.

We know from recent history the role of Sudan's Episcopal Archbishop in peacemaking. Now as Chair of the nation's reconciliation project, his leadership exemplifies the kind expected of a church leader - healing past wounds and being a force for reconciliation in the midst of violent conflict. In areas such as Jonglei, this is a formidable task conferred upon disciples, but one that begs for the healing power of God. Thus, the Church must go forth as peacemaker.

A source of consternation among church leaders since the launching of the new republic has been the slow pace in forming a new permanent constitution - one that is seen as just and fair. Recently the Sudan Council of Churches (SCC), with the backing of all of the churches that comprise its membership, has called for a constitution that embodies the justice sought by the prophet Micah. This charter has much to do with defining South Sudan's future. The SCC statement ([see this web site link](#)) embraces a holy mandate and asks the people of South Sudan to lift up this sacred blueprint as they press for true political reform. Here the Church is not only a prophetic voice, but a catalyst for civic involvement in a major national enterprise.

In addition, there are - no doubt - other frontiers that faith leaders must consider as well. We have recently learned of allegations that human rights abuses are becoming more numerous and serious. These allegations address the punishment of South Sudan dissidents for their opposition. These dissidents include journalists and political activists who differ with the practices and policies of the ruling party. Will the faith community be the voice that reminds government that it is 'the truth that makes us free' with relatively unfettered speech being a necessary ingredient in producing that truth? Will the voice of the faith community insist on this, even in a new nation where different points of view might be seen as readily threatening?

Allegations of corruption are frequently mentioned as an illness afflicting the government. Who else but the Church can be the voice that reminds leaders of their responsibility to be honest stewards of the resources of the country? Who else but the Church can remind leaders to be models of the ethical standards needed to secure the trust of their people?

Of course, the list could be extended. The point is that the faith community faces awesome challenges. The leadership of the Church needs our prayers as it wears bravely the spiritual mantle and the cloak of civil society as well.

Richard Parkins

### **In South Sudan**

[The Sudd Institute](#) recently published a Special Report - 'Peace and Reconciliation in South Sudan: A Conversation for Justice and Stability'.

The summary states, in part, 'South Sudan's long road to statehood was littered with many thorny internal confrontations that will need to be reckoned with through a peace and reconciliation exercise.'

In part, the conclusion states, 'A reconciliation committee will have to do more recording and analysis of the historical grievances that still affect South Sudan, covering as much of the country as possible. The political and ideological disagreements between national leaders that form the backdrop to the push for reconciliation could potentially threaten the effectiveness of the exercise. Reconciliation is a sensitive matter, and if leaders are truly interested in its success, they must carefully weigh their speech and actions, lest a reconciliation effort only further inflames the situation.'

Although this report is necessarily lengthy, because it is so thorough, it is well worth the time it takes to read it.

It is also important to read this report of an assessment conducted by the [South Sudan Law Society](#) entitled 'Challenges of Accountability, An Assessment of Dispute Resolution Processes in Rural South Sudan.' Published in March 2013, the author is David K. Deng.

### **In Sudan**

See this article entitled "Sudan Uses Scorched Earth Tactics in Blue Nile, Amnesty Reports" by Michael Gunn. It was published on 6/11/13 in [Bloomberg Businessweek](#).

[The Niles](#) reports on an interview with Sati Haj, leading member of the opposition alliance and the Political Secretary of the Nasserite Unionist Party. The article, entitled 'It is no longer acceptable to live in fear', covers the Sudanese opposition's stance towards the regime and the change sweeping through the country.

## **In Both Sudans**

[This link](#) takes you to the Background Information for the Civil Society Forum on Sudan and South Sudan held in Addis Ababa in May. [This link](#) takes you to the Resolutions that were decided by that same body when it met recently within the context of the 21st Ordinary Session of the African Union Assembly of Heads of State & Governments. The participants dedicated the session to the legacy & memory of the late Paramount Chief Kuol Deng Majok of Abyei.

[This link](#) will take you to a recent State Department Press Release regarding the recent escalation of oil tensions entitled, 'Sudan and South Sudan Meetings on Oil.'

## **News from AFRECS**

The AFRECS National Conference is scheduled for October 18-20, 2013. Please save the dates of Friday, October 18th through Sunday October 20th and plan to join us in downtown Chicago.

## **Pray**

Pray for safe travel for AFRECS President, Bishop David Jones and Executive Director of AFRECS, Richard Parkins, as they attend a conference of South Sudanese Bishops in Salisbury, UK. A report will be forthcoming in the next E-Blast.

Give thanks for the restart of the Healing, Peace & Reconciliation Conference in South Sudan under the leadership of Episcopal Archbishop Daniel Deng Bul with the support of Roman Catholic Bishop Paride Taban. Pray for the strength of the leaders, the members and for this process to proceed towards healing, peace & reconciliation for all concerned in the new nation of South Sudan.

Pray for an overwhelming response to the advocacy efforts detailed in these E-Blasts. Pray especially for the cessation of indiscriminate bombing in the South Kordofan and Blue Nile States of Sudan and for the people of Yida, as well as other refugee camps, located in Unity State of South Sudan.

## **Give**

Give a modest amount today to further the work of AFRECS by becoming a member. ([See here for how to join.](#))

## **Learn**

Learn more by reviewing the last [E-Blast: May 29th](#) and by going to the [AFRECS home page](#).

In Christ, with thanks for your efforts and prayers for peace,  
Ellen J. Hanckel, Editor