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Date: 23rd June 2017.

PASTORAL MESSAGE OF HOPE FROM THE HEADS OF CHURCHES OF SOUTH SUDAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (SSCC), Addis Ababa - ETHIOPIA, 23rd June 2017

"I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16)

We the Heads of the Member Churches of the South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC), meeting in Addis Ababa on 23rd June 2017, have just returned from a visit to our people who have taken refuge in Ethiopia from the horrific violence in our own country. We have been deeply saddened by listening their experiences, but at the same time we wish to express our gratitude to the Government of Ethiopia, the Churches in Ethiopia and the people of Ethiopia for once again welcoming their South Sudanese neighbours, sisters and brothers in their hour of need. In a world where migrants are becoming increasingly unwelcome almost everywhere, Ethiopia shines out as a beacon of hope and of Gospel values: *"I was a stranger and you welcomed me."* (Matthew 25: 35).

We have listened to our brothers and sisters in the settlements who told us in pain and bitterness what forced them out of South Sudan and of the life they are experiencing. People who grew up as refugees are again forced to become refugees once again. Despite the enormous generosity of the Ethiopians and communities that host them, they struggle to cope up with the new context of refugee life. They have a huge trust in the Government and the Churches in Ethiopia.

What are we going to do with these people who are shedding tears day and night, who are wounded in their hearts, about these children who are suffering? How can the Church be a light in the situation? How can we give hope? God has entrusted us with this responsibility, to be the voice of these people.

We have been reflecting on these questions ever since the current senseless civil war began in South Sudan in December 2013. From the very beginning we have urged that the killing, raping and looting must stop; we recognise that there are legitimate differences between various parties, factions and communities, but we insist that these be addressed through nonviolent means and that the rule of law be respected. In June 2015 we met in Kigali and determined to implement an Action Plan for Peace, to address the root causes of the conflict, using the three pillars of Advocacy, Neutral Forums (dialogue) and Reconciliation. Now in 2017 we meet in ADDIS ABABA with the CHURCHES IN ETHIOPIA, the World Council of Churches (WCC), All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and some of our ecumenical family to reflect on our visit to the refugee camps in GAMBELLA as part of the international advocacy component of our Action Plan for Peace, but also to reflect on the changing circumstances in our country and the role of the Church.

We recognise that the 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS), brokered by IGAD has not brought peace to our nation; indeed in July 2016 the conflict became worse. The agreement expires next year and virtually none of it has been implemented. We ask ourselves how we can move beyond this agreement. We recognise also the fragmentation and division both within and between the different parties, and the escalation of the conflict to areas and

communities not previously involved. This is no longer a conflict between two main parties, led by President Salva KIIR MAYARDIT and former Vice President Dr Riek MACHAR TENY; it is now a multi-faceted conflict with dozens of parties, factions, forces, militias, communities, warlords and other leaders.

Neither can it any longer be characterised as an internal SPLM conflict; it has moved far beyond that. We welcome the institution by the President of a National Dialogue, but we also recognise that for a successful dialogue, a number of criteria must be met, and we note that it has not been accepted by many of the opposition parties. We recognise also a new and alarming factor, as our national economy has collapsed while our rural areas are suffering famine. We believe that both the economic decline and the famine are man-made, a result of mismanagement, blatant corruption, insecurity, lack of governance and the rule of law, but above all the failure by leaders on all sides to prioritise the needs of the people over their own political and personal interests. Greed, hatred and the struggle for power have left the ordinary people of South Sudan, on all sides of the conflict, as the losers. This is anathema to us as Church Leaders.

Thus we come to ETHIOPIA not only to visit our own people but also to bring this message to His Excellency Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. We thank them and the people of Ethiopia for having always been good friends to the people of South Sudan. We thank them, the people and the Churches in Ethiopia, especially at this moment, for the generosity, hospitality and aid extended to our suffering people who fled across the border seeking shelter. Indeed our Father in Heaven will one day say to the Ethiopian people, *"Whatever you did for one of these least brothers [and sisters] of mine, you did for me."* (Matthew 25:40).

As pastors and shepherds, our first priority is the suffering of our people. We urge Ethiopia and other neighbours of South Sudan to continue to welcome our people who seek sanctuary across the borders. We urge the international community to continue their generous humanitarian assistance, and also to recognise that with the scale of the problem so much more is needed. We urge Ethiopia and our other IGAD neighbours to convince the Government of South Sudan to implement meaningful measures to rescue the economy and ease the economic burden of the ordinary citizens. These measures must include a crackdown on corruption and a reduction of military spending, which will both necessitate a change of mind-set. We urge all parties to allow the free movement of peoples and particularly of humanitarian aid, and to cease the targeting of civilians, and allow people to get on with their normal lives, including cultivating their crops and tending their livestock. Once again we state unequivocally that there is no moral justification for killing, raping and looting. This war is evil and sinful; it has no purpose whatsoever and must stop immediately.

We are not politicians and we do not wish to give detailed political recommendations. Nevertheless, we dare to speak to political leaders as Jesus instructed us, *"like sheep among wolves... as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves"* (Matthew 10:16). It is clear to us that the current ARCSS has not brought peace. We welcome all the efforts of the African Union (AU) and the IGAD Countries and we urge Ethiopia and other IGAD partners to determine why ARCSS has failed and what should be the next steps. We also urge our neighbours to use whatever influence they have to prevent the flow of yet more weapons into the conflict. We also respectfully request them to put aside their national interests and think only of the good of the ordinary people of South Sudan. We remind them of the negative consequences which conflicts in the region have on every nation in the region.

We also wish to highlight the historic role of the Church in peace building in Sudan and South Sudan. We repeat the Statement of Intent, which we made in Kigali two years ago, that we intend to be a significant actor to bring about Peace and Reconciliation in South Sudan through non-violent



