

Peace be with you; do not be afraid

A MESSAGE OF HOPE AND HEALING

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you, not as the world gives, do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid. (John 14:27-28)

Preamble

We the Sudan Catholic Bishops' Conference, gathered in Plenary assembly in Rumbek, southern Sudan, from 8th-15th November 2010, have prayed and reflected together with our brother bishops representing the Catholic Church in the whole of Africa on the situation in our beloved Sudan.

Mindful of our responsibility as prophets and shepherds at this crucial time, we write this message of hope on the eve of the referenda and the Season of Advent.

Introduction

The referenda for southern Sudan and Abyei and the popular consultations for Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile are national issues, not just issues of the south and the transitional areas. They were intended to bring healing to our nation, to resolve the longstanding differences which have led to so many decades of tragic conflict. Instead, as the Interim Period of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) draws to a close, we are acutely aware of the uncertainty, fear and even despair that burden the people of Sudan. The build-up of troops on both sides of the north-south border is not conducive to peace. However these tensions need not and should not lead to war. Regardless of the choices made and the lines drawn, peace is possible. We must now look beyond the referenda. All people of good will are called upon to commit themselves to respect the choices of the people of the south, Abyei and the transitional areas and to work for a just and peaceful future for all the people of Sudan and the region. Whether the outcome is unity or secession, Sudan will never be the same again because the people have exercised their free and democratic choice.

The referenda

Preparations for the referenda for the south and Abyei are both far behind schedule and serious concerns remain as to whether they will be implemented on time in a free, fair and transparent manner. The people of southern Sudan and Abyei have built up great expectations. The right of self-determination is a basic human right; the referenda are a vehicle to express that right. Manipulation of the referenda is unethical and immoral. If the referenda prove to be flawed or manipulated, this is likely to lead to uncertainty, instability and even violence.

The popular consultations

The popular consultations for Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile do not give the people the chance to exercise their right of self-determination. Decisions will be made by the state legislatures and the Presidency, and doubts have been expressed as to whether this will truly fulfill the aspirations of all the people of these areas. This too can lead to tension and ultimately conflict, which could draw in the rest of the country.

Minorities

Currently there is a climate of fear amongst southerners living in the north. Inflammatory statements from senior government officials as well as the media have heightened tensions. The discourse amongst ordinary northerners appears to have changed, with threats and intimidation against

southerners. All of this threatens the peaceful coexistence of the people of north and south. Southerners have begun moving back to the south in large numbers, but many will remain in the north by choice or circumstances. All must be protected. Northerners living in the south may also face uncertainty, but we welcome the Government of Southern Sudan's guarantees of security and rights for all.

Blessed are the peace-makers

Southerners fear a unity which binds and oppresses, prohibits all forms of opposition and which imposes uniformity; northerners fear secession

; fear leads to instability and violence. Fear needs to be replaced by hope so that all people can live in freedom and peace. The outcome of the referenda should not be seen as a threat to either side, but an opportunity. If the outcome is secession, this does not mean the end of the relationship between north and south. Secession is a division of land, not a division of peoples. It need not be a breaking of relationships. Cooperation and collaboration must continue in a spirit of good neighbourliness. Mutually beneficial compromises must be reached over issues such as oil, borders and citizenship. Southerners will continue to live in the north and northerners in the south. Churches and mosques will continue in both the north and the south. We, as children of God, extend our hands to our Muslim brothers and sisters in Sudan in a spirit of peace and reconciliation. True peace is the gift of God: "Blessed are the peace-makers" (Matthew 5:9). We invite all people of good will in Sudan, the region and the world to build new social relationships which reach beyond the religious and cultural divide. We commit ourselves to do so.

Call for peace

We are ambassadors for Christ; it is as though God were appealing through us, and the appeal that we make in Christ's name is: be reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5:20)

As your spiritual leaders, we raise our voices on behalf of the voiceless and the vulnerable and we offer guidance at this crucial moment in the history of our country.

- We call upon all people of good will to pray for peace now, during the referendum period, and afterwards within the richness of your own religious traditions. We draw attention to our own 101 days of prayer for a peaceful referendum, and we invite everyone to join us in this season of prayer.
- The CPA brought a respite from violence. We express our gratitude to God and our appreciation to all of those who worked to make this possible. Now is the time to build the true peace. In this Christian Season of Advent, which is a time of joyful hope and expectation, we call for personal transformation. We call upon all people of good will to leave behind mistrust and hatred and move to a new life of justice, peace, love and reconciliation. "Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God's people on earth!" (Luke 2:14)
- In spite of all the technical difficulties, we repeat our demand and our hope that the referenda for the south and Abyei be held on time in a free, fair and transparent manner.
- We encourage all efforts to independently observe and monitor the entire process, particularly the registration.
- We recognize that the results of the referenda may be disputed by one side or the other. We call for an international mechanism to resolve the dispute in a way which upholds the will of the people rather than simply the legal technicalities of the process.

- We call for calm after the referenda outcomes have been announced. In the event that there is a dispute, we call on all people to exercise civic responsibility and refrain from impulsive actions while the parties and the international community solve it through peaceful negotiations. The ending of the CPA should not lead back to the violence which it was designed to resolve.
- We call directly upon our youth, who have suffered so much and who are the future of our country, to refrain from being drawn in to political violence and to heed the call for peace and restraint in order to build the future they desire.
- We repeat our earlier calls that the aspirations of the people of the transitional areas of Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile should be taken seriously, and creative solutions be found before the end of the Interim Period on 8th July 2011.
- We call on both governments and the media to refrain from inflammatory statements, to stop the messages of hate and misinformation, to reduce the level of tension and to take positive steps to assure all the people that they will be protected.
- We call upon all to uphold the right of freedom of movement, and to provide the necessary resources, facilitation and protection for their movement and resettlement. In particular we call upon our own CARITAS/CIDSE agencies and the rest of the international humanitarian community to assist us.
- We also call upon both governments in Sudan to respect the rights and dignity of minorities in north and south, and to guarantee their protection. We call upon the international community to prioritise the safety and security of these vulnerable communities, particularly southerners in the north and the people of the transitional areas.
- We call for a continuation of dialogue between north and south on post-referendum issues. Whatever the outcome of the referenda, we call upon all to be committed to developing relationships between two peoples who have shared so much history.
- We are concerned at the suffering still being caused by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). We urge those supporting the LRA to desist. We endorse the recent recommendations from the church leaders of the four affected countries that there should be a negotiated settlement, that civilians should be protected by the appropriate authorities and that humanitarian assistance should be given to the affected populations.

As pastors, we particularly speak to our own Catholic family, but in addition we address our call to:

- The Muslim community in Sudan.
- The governments and political parties of Sudan.
- All the people of Sudan.
- The people, the churches, the elder statesmen and the governments of our region, particularly the African Union, Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Arab League, Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA), Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), our neighbours and the whole of Africa.

- The international community, particularly the UN, the Troika (USA, UK and Norway), Italy, other key states and stakeholders.
- Our CARITAS/CIDSE agencies, Caritas Internationalis and the international humanitarian aid organisations.

Conclusion

We, your pastors, re-commit ourselves and our Church to work for a peaceful Sudan.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace!
Where there is hatred let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is war, peace;
Where there is sadness, joy.

Oh Divine Master,
Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
To be understood, as to understand;
To be loved, as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
It is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

(Prayer of St Francis of Assisi)

Given in Rumbek, southern Sudan, on the 33rd Sunday of the Church Year, 14th November 2010