

STATEMENT BY SUDAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES  
ON  
THE CURRENT SITUATION IN JONGLEI STATE

18TH JANUARY 2012

*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.  
(John 14:27)*

The Church has a mandate from Jesus Christ to bring his peace to the world. It is indeed not “as the world gives”. Peace as the Church understands it is not simply the absence of fighting, nor is it an uneasy short-term truce while the underlying issues remain unresolved. Peace is not maintained by military force, although all of these may provide a window of opportunity to pursue true peace. Peace, true peace, the “my peace” of Jesus Christ, is based on the dignity and equality of every human person made in the image and likeness of God, and includes love, forgiveness, reconciliation and justice.

The Church expresses its deep sorrow and regret that violence has broken out in South Sudan so soon after Independence. Our thoughts, prayers and sympathy are with all the affected individuals, families and communities. As a nation we need to rediscover and reclaim the peace and unity which was felt so strongly during the period of the Referendum and Independence celebrations, and which was an example to the whole world.

In fulfilment of Christ’s mandate, and at the request of the Government of South Sudan, the Sudan Council of Churches spearheaded a peace initiative between the Lou Nuer and Murle communities, also involving other communities in Jonglei State, for several months. This included visits to the communities by Church and political leaders for fact-finding and mobilisation, concurrent but separate conferences for each of the two communities, production of situation analyses and selection of mobilisers/negotiators at those meetings, and training of the mobilisers/negotiators. It was to have led to a joint conference in mid-December 2011, but the situation on the ground and the advice of the political leadership resulted in the postponement of the conference. Tragically, serious fighting then broke out around Christmas, which ought to be a holy season of peace and love. Many lives were lost, atrocities were committed, a humanitarian disaster was caused, and regrettably a new cycle of revenge and retaliation began.

SCC would like to highlight some of the factors which contributed to the recent fresh outbreak of violence.

- The Murle community is perceived by most of the other communities in Jonglei State as being a perpetrator of constant raids. Even during the

peace process there were reports of raids by Murle. There have already been retaliatory attacks on the Lou by Murle, as well as a reported escalation of the conflict by attacks on the Dinka.

- The Lou Nuer youth apparently feel that they are justified in defending their community against Murle attacks, in the absence of Government protection and action, but using armed force is clearly not the way to do this, particularly in the middle of an ongoing peace process.
- While commending the Government of South Sudan and UNMISS for the eventual rapid deployment of forces, without which the human tragedy might have been even greater, nevertheless it has to be said that the deployment of SPLA was too little and too late. It is the responsibility of the Government to provide security to all communities of South Sudan to avoid citizens taking the law into their own hands.
- The political leadership of both communities proved to be out of touch with their people, particularly the armed youth, and were unable significantly to influence events on the ground, nor even to provide accurate information about the situation.
- Local Church leaders on the ground also appeared unable to influence events. The SCC peace process aimed to prevent immediate violence and was thus, in a way, dealing with the symptoms rather than the root causes.
- The challenge of engaging with the armed youth was keenly felt. There is a clear disconnect between the youth and both the traditional and political leaders. The tradition of youth respecting and listening to their elders has been lost. Without the youth's involvement, and their sense of ownership of the peace process, any attempt at peace will fail.
- The conflict has moved far beyond cattle-raiding, abductions and revenge. The Lou Nuer expressed a deep-rooted hatred of the Murle. Brutal actions were carried out against non-combatants. Ethnic hatred was expressed verbally, in graffiti left by the attackers, and on the internet, and this could be the precursor to larger-scale atrocities. This dynamic has been growing for some time and is very worrying. It lends a sense of urgency to peace efforts.
- Extremely young children are being "initiated" into the hatred and killing, ensuring that it will continue into the next generation.
- The two communities have moved away from traditional cattle-raiding practices and are using more sophisticated and destructive military tactics, with modern weapons and good organisation, training, intelligence and communications.
- Other communities in Jonglei State can and have played either a positive or a negative role in the resolution of conflict, and are beginning to be drawn in to the conflict.
- Rumours, incitement and inaccurate and unsubstantiated information have contributed to the conflict. Through the internet, the Diaspora have played a role.
- Right across South Sudan people are traumatised as a result of five decades of war. The current conflict is, in part, the result of trauma.

Communities are still using the same self-defence mechanisms which they used during the war, when there was no government and no security, even though these are now inappropriate in the new dispensation of peace and nation-building.

The peace process has not failed, because peace cannot be allowed to fail. The process will continue. SCC anticipates that there will now be two tracks.

The first track will be spearheaded by the Government and political leadership and will be a higher-level process. It will include the provision of security, humanitarian relief to affected communities and support to addressing major long-standing development challenges such as provision of roads to ensure the overall strategy is a success, all as a means to allow a window of opportunity for the peace process.

The second track will be spearheaded by the Church and will be a grassroots peace process, using lessons learned from the People to People Peace Process (Wunlit), and from Church-led initiatives in other pastoralist conflicts in East Africa, as well as reflection on the current situation. In particular it will try to involve the armed youth, who are a force in their own right, not under the control of either traditional or modern leadership structures. SCC will identify, train, equip and support key individuals from within the communities (and particularly from within the youth) who will act as peace mobilisers. The network formed by these individuals, not only amongst the Lou Nuer and Murle but also other communities in Jonglei State, will form the basis for future peace processes. It is a model which can later be extended to other states.

The Church will seek to liaise and collaborate with the high-level track, while devoting its own efforts to the grassroots track.

The Church therefore commits itself to a long and severe peace process which does not focus primarily on “fire-fighting”, of dealing with the short-term symptoms of conflict, but rather on the long-term changing of attitudes and value systems which will eventually lead to a generation free of armed conflict. This change from a culture of violence to a culture of peace will involve trauma healing, as well as dealing with the roots of the conflicts between communities.

There have been many peace processes, conferences, meetings, etc in Jonglei State in the past, and many recommendations have come from the various communities, but few of these recommendations have actually been implemented. In particular, it is clear that under-development is a key driver of conflict in the area, and this is exacerbated by a perception that some communities are neglected. Development of the more isolated parts of Jonglei State must become a priority for Government (eg roads), the business community (eg mobile phone networks) and the aid community.

The Church, speaking in its Prophetic role, makes the following urgent appeals:

**To all the communities in Jonglei State:**

- To cease immediately all armed conflicts, whatever the perceived provocation, and to allow disputes to be resolved by peaceful means.
- To cooperate with the Government, UN and Church to return abductees and cattle.
- To step back from ethnic hatred.
- For the armed youth and its leaders to engage seriously with the Church peace process.
- For the youth and traditional leadership to reconnect, and to re-establish traditional relationships and values for resolving issues.
- Immediately to stop initiating children into the cycle of hatred.

**To the Governments of South Sudan and of Jonglei State:**

- To provide adequate security to protect all citizens and communities in Jonglei State.
- To initiate a high level peace process including traditional and political leaders.
- To support all communities affected by conflict with humanitarian assistance equitably and without bias.
- To liaise and collaborate with the Church grassroots peace initiative.
- To provide public works (particularly roads) and to encourage development in Jonglei State.
- To handle disarmament issues sensitively and comprehensively, in a manner and at a time which will promote peace rather than exacerbate conflict, and provide adequate security for those communities which are disarmed.
- To implement a system of law and order in which there is accountability and justice for all.

**To the UN, particularly UNMISS:**

- To continue to deploy armed peace-keepers in Jonglei State in numbers sufficient to exercise their Chapter VII responsibility to protect civilians.
- To continue to monitor the situation and provide information in a timely fashion to all stakeholders.
- To continue to support the Government in its responsibility to protect its citizens.
- To continue to support the SCC in its peace process, including logistics.
- To provide humanitarian relief and development in Jonglei State.

**To the NGOS and donors:**

- To continue to support the SCC peace process.
- To provide immediate humanitarian relief in the aftermath of the recent fighting.
- To provide development assistance in Jonglei State in a manner which is perceived by all communities to be equitable, and which does not exacerbate underlying tensions by appearing to favour one community over others.

**To the business community:**

- To enhance communications in Jonglei State by extending the mobile phone networks to all key centres of population.

**To the Diaspora:**

- To cease encouraging and supporting violent solutions to perceived problems in South Sudan; rather to enlighten your home communities with the values of law and order which you find in your adopted homes in USA, Canada and elsewhere.
- To refrain from using the armed youth in Jonglei State for political advantage.

**To all citizens of the Republic of South Sudan:**

- Seek and pray for a lasting solution to the conflict and press all actors to contribute to this.
- Rumours should not be taken at face value until objective investigations are conducted for each incident. All citizens must be critical of what they hear and read and also measure what they say, as each word can help build or destroy the peace.
- South Sudanese must accept accountability for acts they have committed which violate the rights of others and the laws of the nation. Justice rather than impunity must be a foundation for the future.

*Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. (John 14:27)*

Juba, 18<sup>th</sup> January 2012