

SUDAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE (SCBC)

A future full of hope

A MESSAGE OF HOPE AND A CALL TO ACTION

Addressed to all the people of Sudan, the Sudanese leaders, and all people of good will

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord. (Luke 4:18-19)

PREAMBLE

We, the Catholic Bishops of Sudan, gathered in an Extraordinary Plenary Session in Juba from 15th-22nd July 2010, reflecting and praying together on the present situation in Sudan, greet you and present to you this **message of hope and call to action.**

This is an historic moment. This is a moment of change. Sudan will never be the same again.

After centuries of oppression and exploitation, after decades of war and violence which have marked and marred the lives of so many Sudanese in south and north with no respect for human life and dignity, and now, after 5 years of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), we have reached a time to move and prepare for change.

We believe it is not the will of God for human beings to endure such suffering and oppression, particularly at the hands of fellow human beings, and so we bring a message of hope and encouragement to our people and all people of good will.

The Catholic Church proclaims that human life is sacred and that the dignity of the person is at the core of a moral vision for society. Our belief in the sanctity of human life and the inherent dignity of the human person is the foundation of all the principles of our social teaching. Our tradition proclaims that the person is not only sacred but also social. How we organise our society directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community. Our Church teaches that the role of the government and other institutions is to protect human life and human dignity and promote the common good. Human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met. “The Church has always had the duty of scrutinising the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel” (Vatican II, *The Church in the Modern World*). The Church is a teacher of truth for humanity and has the right and duty to speak on political and social issues that affect the people.

ANALYSIS

Agreement signed and hopes raised

When the CPA was signed amid great hope in 2005, a key element was that the unity of Sudan should be made attractive and given a chance by addressing the root causes of the conflicts in Sudan.

These root causes include:

- Identity – Sudan is a multi-cultural, multi-lingual, multi-ethnic, multi-religious society, but in practice one entity still dominates and imposes itself on others in an oppressive manner, at every level.
- A highly centralised system of governance which marginalises those on the periphery.

Little progress

The CPA has brought some progress. The conflict between south and north was moved from the military to the political arena. Space was created, after the fighting ceased, for development projects to go ahead in the south and the marginalised areas of Abyei, Nuba Mountains (which is in Southern Kordofan State) and Blue Nile. There have been attempts to address the Millennium Development Goals, particularly in the areas of health and education. Reconstruction and rehabilitation have taken place in many war-afflicted areas. A system of governance has been put in place in these areas which, while still new and fragile, is making great progress. Increased oil revenue has become available to both north and south. There is freedom of movement. There is an increased awareness of human rights. Elections have been held peacefully, although not perfectly.

However, war continues in Darfur. Islam continues to be the source of legislation in the north, which adversely affects the rights of all, particularly non-Muslims. The human rights climate is deteriorating again. A number of oppressive laws, including the National Security Act, have not been repealed or brought in line with the new Interim Constitution. The powers of the national security organs, characterised by torture, intimidation and detention without trial, have not been curtailed. Humanitarian organisations in Darfur and the rest of the north are subject to restrictive regulations and kidnappings, and many have been expelled.

Weak governance in the south gives rise to corruption, nepotism, lack of respect for human rights, harassment of humanitarian agencies and power struggles. Divisions among peoples are being exploited by some elements. Violence still afflicts many parts of southern Sudan. Incursions by the Lord's Resistance Army continue. Many people still suffer food insecurity and lack of basic services.

Unity or secession, what do they mean?

If unity is an option, we must understand what kind of unity we are speaking of. It must be a unity embracing all, in a just, free and open society, where the human dignity of every citizen is safeguarded and respected. All indications are that unity has not been made attractive to the people of southern Sudan. At the same time, the root causes of the conflicts have not been addressed. The leadership of Sudan and the political establishment bear a great responsibility for this tragic situation. A unity which binds and oppresses, prohibits all opposition, a unity which imposes uniformity and condemns those who differ in faith and culture must be rejected.

If secession is chosen, what are the challenges that will face the people of both north and south Sudan? How will the precious values of honesty and integrity, tolerance and respect, compassion for the weak and poor, be upheld and guaranteed? How will good governance and the rule of law be assured? How will the dignity of the human person and the common good be respected and protected?

THE REFERENDUM

The process

The CPA provides that the people of southern Sudan should exercise their right to self-determination through a referendum to determine their future status in accordance with the provisions of the Interim National Constitution of 2005 and the Southern Sudan Referendum Act of 2009.

We remain deeply concerned that the time remaining before the due date of 9th January 2011 is painfully short and inadequate, and there is a fear that the CPA signatories have not prioritised this and that transparency and inclusiveness are lacking.

The following have not been done or are behind schedule:

- The Southern Sudan Referendum Commission has barely begun its work.
- Demarcation of the north-south borders is not complete.
- Regulations and procedures for the referendum have not been provided.
- Establishment of High Referendum Committees in states is not completed.
- Formation of sub-committees in counties and referendum centres is not completed.
- Voter eligibility has not yet been clarified.
- Registration has not even begun.
- Registers and other referendum materials have not been provided.
- Voter awareness and education has barely begun, and indeed cannot proceed without clarification of some of the above issues.

Secession can be chosen by a simple majority of 50% plus one of votes cast. However there is also a requirement that 60% of registered voters must cast their vote in order for secession to take place. If fewer than 60% cast their votes, the status quo (unity) continues. We fear that this voter turnout condition may lead to confusion and manipulation. The registration of voters residing outside southern Sudan presents real problems in establishing voter eligibility and monitoring the legitimacy of the process.

The transitional areas

The people of Abyei also have a referendum to choose to remain in Southern Kordofan or to become part of Warrap State in Greater Bahr el Ghazal. Borders and voter eligibility have officially been agreed, but there remain currents of dissatisfaction amongst other groups in the area which could derail the process. The Abyei Referendum Commission has not yet been formed. Abyei has already experienced outbreaks of violence and we fear further violence.

The people of the Nuba Mountains (in Southern Kordofan State) and Blue Nile State do not have the right of self-determination, despite the fact that many feel culturally and ethnically connected to the south and fought alongside southerners in the liberation struggle. They have a form of popular consultation which has still not been clearly understood, and which appears to give the decision to legislators and the Presidency rather than directly to the people. The popular consultation mechanisms are already behind schedule in the Nuba Mountains (Southern Kordofan). We fear that popular consultation, even if free and fair, does not meet the aspirations of a large section of the population of these two areas, as they have no choice but to remain under northern governance.

We fear that dissatisfaction in all three of these transitional areas may lead to violence which could derail any peaceful future for the whole of Sudan.

Post-referendum arrangements

We are encouraged to note that the two CPA signatories have created structures to negotiate post-referendum arrangements, which are crucial to a peaceful future, whatever the outcome of the referendum. However we are concerned at the late establishment of these structures, and the absence of Church, civil society and other actors, which could lead to a lack of transparency and inclusiveness.

CALL TO ACTION

We call upon our brothers and sisters and all people of good will to pray earnestly for a peaceful and fruitful referendum. May the God of Justice and Truth guide us all at this momentous time.

We urge our leaders in both north and south to ensure that the referenda for southern Sudan and Abyei should take place on time, in a free and fair manner, and that the outcomes are recognised and respected. The referendum process must be conducted peacefully and transparently.

We urge those who are leading the referendum process to redouble their efforts to ensure that all outstanding measures are implemented in good time.

We call upon the international community to assist in the technical, logistical and operational stages of the referendum, to monitor and observe the process from start to finish, to guarantee implementation of the results and to mediate in case of any disagreement. We place our trust in those who have accompanied the peace process so far, particularly IGAD and friends of IGAD, (USA, UK, Italy and Norway), AU, UN, Arab league, to continue to encourage the signatories to implement the referendum, and to act in the interests of the people of Sudan as impartial and honest brokers.

We call upon all citizens who register, to ensure that they actually cast their vote. We urge international and domestic monitors to pay close attention to the registration process from the beginning, and particularly to the registration of those living outside southern Sudan.

Our hearts are pained by reports of intimidation and threats causing fear among southerners living and working in northern Sudan as we approach the time of the referendum. We urge all parties to guarantee the safety and freedom of all people of Sudan in the run up to the referendum and beyond, regardless of the outcome.

In the event that unity of Sudan is the legitimate outcome of the process, we call for a change of heart among those in power, to bring about a unity embracing all, in a just, free and open society, where the human dignity of every citizen is safeguarded and respected.

In the event that the people of southern Sudan choose secession, we call upon those in power to ensure good neighbourly relations and a smooth and peaceful transition. In particular we encourage the parties to reach amicable solutions to practical questions such as oil, citizenship and border issues – solutions which benefit all.

We urge the authorities in northern Sudan to respect the freedom and human rights, including freedom of religion, of all inhabitants. Given the fears which exist in the hearts of southerners in the north, it is important to create a climate of human security and well-being, and respect of basic human rights, in accordance with Sudan's obligations under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

We urge the authorities in southern Sudan to respect the rights of northerners in the south. We call for good governance, with zero tolerance for corruption and nepotism, and an increased delivery of basic services. We call on all parties, factions and ethnic groups to end violence and to unite for the common good.

We also call for ways to be found to meet the legitimate aspirations of the people of Nuba mountains (in Southern Kordofan state) and Blue Nile state.

COMMITMENT

We commit ourselves and our Church to the work of peace-building and reconciliation on a daily and practical basis, in collaboration with others and in line with Catholic Social Teaching. We pledge ourselves to journey together with our people towards a just and lasting peace.

CONCLUSION

I call heaven and earth today to witness against you; I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live... (Deuteronomy 30:19)

We have come a long way to reach this point. Our journey has not been easy and we have met with great difficulties. But we have faced these challenges as best we could with the help of God. Our hope is not dimmed, and we look to the future with confidence in God's loving care for us all.

We therefore encourage all those who are entitled to vote in the referenda in Southern Sudan and in Abyei to choose what kind of future they, their children and generations to come will enjoy. We encourage them to choose what kind of life they and their offspring will have, a life of freedom with justice and equal rights for all. As the Shepherds of the Church in Sudan we place our hope in God and look forward to a just and peaceful society where each person's rights and dignity are upheld.

We encourage them to choose life.

For I know well the plans I have in mind for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare, not for woe! plans to give you a future full of hope. (Jeremiah 29:11)

Juba 22nd July 2010