

August 08, 2016



SOUTH SUDAN - From Bishop Eduardo Hildeboro. Dear my beloved Sisters and Brothers,

“Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet. 3:15).

As Christians we must remain steadfast in this time of trial, just as we have throughout the centuries before and now in South Sudan, through the long turns of struggles for survival in changing succession of states and governments. Be patient, steadfast and full of hope so that we in turn among ourselves might fill the heart of every one of our brothers or sisters who shares in this same trial with hope. Be active and, provided this conforms to love, participate in any sacrifice that ‘gentle cry out’ asks of you to overcome our present travail...

My country, South Sudan, is only five years old, yet many people are questioning whether it should exist at all. I can understand why they might think so, when there is constant fighting resulting in huge loss of innocent lives and millions of people have been displaced, fled into neighbouring countries as refugees putting them at risk of starvation.

I happened to be in the capital, Juba (between 06-13th July, 2016), when the latest violence broke out. For five days I was trapped as the city suffered heavy artillery bombardment and attacks by helicopter gunships for the first time in its history. I went to the mortuary at Juba’s civil hospital, and wept to see the bodies of hundreds of government and opposition soldiers, which had been dumped in piles on the ground for relatives to claim their own (if they risked coming out at all).

It would be easy to despair of South Sudan, yet I tell my people that we must have hope. We need to remember that despite the country’s many complex political and ethnic divisions, those taking part in the fighting are a very small minority. This conflict has attracted little attention in Europe, Americas or Asia, which are dealing with their own crises, such as mass shootings and

the Bastille Day lorry attack in Nice, France murder of a Catholic Priest, shootings everywhere in major cities in our one planet. But if South Sudan is ignored, the tide of refugees reaching Europe's shores could be swelled.

The international community must continue to play her pivotal role in persuading President Salva Kiir and former Vice-President Riek Machar, to return to the negotiating table and implement the power-sharing agreement they signed last August. With international support, and that of the Catholic Church and other members of the South Sudan Council of Churches, as well as the aid agencies, such as Cafod and Trocaire, Caritas, and other humanitarian agencies, which are helping people stay alive, we can make sure that our country has a future.

South Sudan does not have to remain poor. It has agricultural potential, minerals and oil, but development has constantly been hampered by conflict. Oil production, the source of most of the country's earnings, has fallen by more than half from the peak reached shortly before independence. Most people want nothing more than the chance to make a better life for themselves and their families, but for that to happen, we need to overcome the culture of violence that is tearing our society apart. Respect for human life is the starting point.

On the roads to the independence of South Sudan, the Catholic Church has always been there, upholding the value of human dignity and peace. Sometimes our message has been understood; at other times we have been dismissed, or pushed to the periphery. But the church cannot ignore the moral and human costs of so much violence in our midst, and is working in dioceses, parishes and schools to bring a change in people's hearts.

I know this article I am writing is not enough. Words cannot stop weapons; statements will not contain hatred. Yet commitment and conversion can change us, and together we can change our culture and communities.

The best antidote to violence is hope. People with a stake in society do not destroy communities. Both individuals and institutions should be held accountable for how they attack or enhance the common good.

We all face, today, a way that is blocked and a future that promises only woe. My word in this brief article is a word of hope, patience, steadfastness and new action for a better future. As

Christians we are obliged by our faith in God to carry a message, and we have to continue to carry it despite the thorns, despite blood and daily difficulties. We place our hope in God, who will grant us relief in His own time. At the same time, we continue to act in concord with God and God's will, building, resisting evil and bringing closer the day of justice and peace.

More than any other times in South Sudan: This is a time for repentance. Repentance brings us back into the communion of love with everyone who suffers, the prisoners, the wounded, those afflicted with temporary or permanent handicaps, the children who cannot live their childhood and each one who mourns a dear one. The communion of love says to every believer in spirit and in truth: if my brother is a prisoner I am a prisoner; if his home is destroyed, my home is destroyed; when my brother or sister is killed, then I too am killed. We face the same challenges and share in all that has happened and will happen.

Perhaps, as individuals or as Churches, we were silent when we should have raised our voices in faithful prayers or also to condemn the injustice and share in the suffering. This is a time of repentance for our silence, indifference, I do not care attitudes, lack of communion, either because we did not persevere in our ministry in this beloved South Sudan and abandoned it, or because we did not think and do enough to reach a new and integrated vision and remained divided, contradicting our witness and weakening our word. Repentance for our concern with our institutions, sometimes at the expense of our ministry, thus silencing the prophetic voice given by the Spirit to the Churches.

What is so consoling is the love in practice we continue to receive from many of our brothers and sisters around the world, by and large of those who have refused to leave South Sudan at this time. Our beloved missionaries from several congregations. The magic catch word –SOLIDARITY with South Sudan – influenced all our friends who have refused to leave South Sudan, 'thank you! I am thankful equally to those who have left the country but are fully in **solidarity** with us – be blessed by our Saviour Jesus Christ. Please our word as South Sudanese is first and foremost; gratitude for the **solidarity** you have shown toward us in word, deed and presence among us. It is a message of **solidarity** with those who have suffered because of their services, advocacy for law and justice. I recall here with anxious soul;
Rev. Sr. Dr. Veronika Teresia Rackova, SSpS in Yei.

Hope and faith in God. In the absence of all hope, we cry out our cry of hope. We ought to

believe in God, good and just. We must surely believe that God's goodness will finally triumph over the evil of hate and of death that still persist in our land. My prayer is that, we will see here "a new land" and "a new human being", capable of rising up in the spirit to love each one of his or her brothers and sisters. Amen may His will prevail!

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