

CHOOSE LIFE: A VISION FOR A PEACEFUL SUDAN

SUDANESE CHURCH POSITION PAPER ON THE CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION, THE REFERENDA AND POPULAR CONSULTATIONS IN 2011 AND BEYOND

5 May 2010

*I SET BEFORE YOU LIFE AND DEATH; BLESSING AND CURSING; THEREFORE
CHOOSE LIFE, THAT BOTH YOU AND YOUR DESCENDANTS MAY LIVE
(DEUTERONOMY 30:19)*

Preamble and Background

This is a historic period in the history of Sudan. After the referendum in 2011 Sudan will never be the same again, whether it remains united or becomes two countries. Time is short and urgent reflection and action are needed to ensure a peaceful future. This is Sudan's Kairos Moment. It is time to choose life. We have no time to waste.

Our country Sudan is blessed with many resources, human and natural. As is inherent in the meaning of the name Sudan, we belong together in this vast land in spite of our multiplicity of ethnic groups, languages, cultures, religions, gender, age and status. We are the people of God in Sudan, endowed with dignity and bound by destiny.

But history has shown over and over again, that we are marred by conflict and violence both before independence (1821-1955) and after independence to the present (1956-2010). War, suffering, poverty, sickness and ignorance have been our unwelcome and unfriendly companions. The historical root causes of conflict in our land have been lack of agreement on national identity, wealth sharing, power sharing and governance and more recently on issues of

natural resources, in particular oil revenue. Attempts to resolve these issues included many agreements that were not honoured until the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005.

Although the CPA offered the best alternative to address the conflict in Sudan, the Sudanese Church is however concerned that some of its key provisions have not been implemented up to now, with only 8 months remaining to the referendum. The provisions in question include north–south border demarcation, and the establishment of commissions for the referenda and popular consultations. Similarly, not much has been done on post-referendum arrangements such as citizenship of southerners in the north and northerners in the south, trans-boundary rights, the currency, international treaties and conventions, foreign debt, protection of the rights of religious minorities and the issue of resource management, especially oil and water, in the event that the south opts for independence.

The Sudanese Church in her prophetic role has always accompanied the Sudanese people in times of peace and war. Our position papers during the war (*Here we Stand United for Peace* and *Let My People Choose*) show this. Our member churches have also been involved in addressing issues affecting our society before, during and after the signing of the CPA. We have advocated for peace and reconciliation among communities, provided social services such as schools and health clinics besides sharing the gospel. It is in this context that the Sudanese Church leaders from 14 church denominations throughout Sudan gathered in Juba with their international partners from 23-26 March 2010 to review the current situation in Sudan and to prepare for the future. Church leaders from Kenya, Uganda, Malawi, Rwanda and South Africa and partners from the international community were present in solidarity with the Church and people of Sudan. Representatives of the Muslim community attended part of the meeting.

The Sudanese Church is concerned at increasing violence within the south and Darfur, at delays in implementing the CPA, and at the lack of an international political consensus on the next steps. The Church cares about the freedom, dignity and human rights of all the people of Sudan, whether in the north or the south, and encourages a spirit of good neighbourliness and cooperation.

Concerns:

The Sudanese Church is particularly concerned about the following:

Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile must be put at the top of all stakeholders' agendas as a matter of priority. Their situation requires special status and a new way of looking at them. The Church fears that failure to address the aspirations of the people of these two states could derail any peaceful post-2011 transition.

The two areas occupy a unique position in Sudan. They are north of the 1956 boundary and thus form part of northern Sudan. For this reason, although a considerable number of people from the two areas fought alongside Southerners for a "New Sudan," the Government of Sudan (GoS) refused to negotiate about their choices as part of the IGAD process. As a result, they were provided a separate forum for negotiations under the auspices of the Government of Kenya, leading to a protocol which was then included in the CPA. They were not granted the right of self-determination (as called for in the Church's *Let My People Choose*), but were instead granted a "popular consultation" about their form of government within the north which has not given them the options of joining the south or autonomous rule of themselves.

However many people in both states, who fought alongside southerners during the civil war and who feel culturally and politically closer to the south than the north, may not be satisfied with this arrangement. The concept of popular consultations is unclear to most stakeholders, and even the Popular Consultation Act of December 2009 does not provide the necessary clarity. It also lacks a mechanism to deal with possible different views of the people and the commission to be set up.

In addition, the contested results of the census led to the postponement of the most important election in Southern Kordofan which is the key in the process of Popular Consultation. The Church calls upon the presidency to ensure that the census dispute is resolved and elections conducted within 60 days, as decided by the National Elections Commission.

The Sudanese Church calls upon the presidency to urgently establish the independent evaluation commissions for Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile states as stipulated by the CPA. The Sudanese Church also calls upon both State assemblies, once constituted, to timely establish a parliamentary assessment and evaluation commission, and to enable a broad based consultation, dialogue and reconciliation process of all stakeholders.

Referenda 2011: The Sudanese Church calls for peaceful and full implementation of referenda in the South and Abyei areas as agreed in the Referendum Acts of December 2009. In that

regard, the Church calls for the speedy appointment/establishment of referendum commissions for South Sudan and Abyei. Having learned valuable lessons from the aftermath of the recent national elections, the Sudanese Church calls upon all stakeholders to ensure that the referenda in 2011 are peaceful, free and fair. This is an opportunity for the south Sudanese and Abyei people to exercise their democratic rights within the framework of the CPA.

The Church calls upon the stakeholders to ensure that logistics, registration of voters, voter education, scrutiny of voter registers and security arrangements are all put in place before the referendum day. Following the voting, all parties must accept the results. If there are grievances and disputes, these must be solved by legal means, not by violence. The Church calls for international monitoring of the referenda, as stipulated in the CPA.

In the event that southerners and the people of Abyei choose secession, expert opinion suggests that there needs to be a transition period. In order to avoid confusion which may lead to violence, the Church urges that post-referendum mechanisms to manage the transition period be negotiated well in advance and be communicated clearly and transparently to the population.

South-south and Darfur conflicts:

The church is appalled by the increasing number of inter-ethnic clashes in Southern Sudan, most prominently in Jonglei, Upper Nile, Lakes and Warrap States, the ongoing attacks by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Western Equatoria and the continuing violence in Darfur.

In addition, we are particularly alarmed by the increase of violence in some parts of Southern Sudan and Darfur including the abuse, rape and killing of women, elderly and children, aimed at destroying the social fabric within and between communities. We strongly condemn these atrocities and any other form of violence and urge both the Government of National Unity (GNU) in Khartoum and the Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS) in Juba to take responsibility, to fulfil their obligation to protect their citizens and bring to justice those responsible for committing and encouraging such attacks.

The infiltration of arms has also recently compounded the situation. The Church calls for urgent general disarmament of warring communities and provision of security by the government. At the same time, the introduction of alternative means of livelihood is essential. We believe the provision of socio-economic infrastructure, social services and development will

greatly reduce community conflicts.

It is our responsibility to call for peace and reconciliation among these communities. The Church therefore urges the Government of National Unity, the Government of Southern Sudan and those of the states to fulfil their obligations in that regard so that the CPA is truly realised among these communities. We also urge the international community and NGOs to play their role in solving this problem by supporting income-generating projects, food security, skill training and peace-building programs.

The Church and southerners in the north: Life has not always been easy for Christians and the marginalized people living in the north. There is a great deal of uncertainty about their future in the advent of the referenda. The Sudanese Church is concerned and therefore calls upon all the stakeholders to put in place appropriate measures to protect Christians and the marginalized people in the north, most especially the southerners and also northerners in the south, to assist IDPs, and to safeguard the rights of the Christians in the north, most especially if the results of the referenda opt for secession.

Conclusion and the Way Forward

The Sudanese Church undertakes:

- To roll out a new People-to-People Peace and Reconciliation Process of dialogue to counter internal conflicts in the south, the marginalised areas and other parts of Sudan. This new People-to-People Peace and Reconciliation Process will deliberately involve communities at the grassroots, as well as other levels, to make and maintain peace. We believe that our communities desperately need peace and will respond to this process as they did in the 1990's before the CPA. The new People-to-People Peace and Reconciliation Process began with a Church Leaders' Forum (March 2010) and includes a dialogue between the Church and government (June 2010), dubbed "Kajiko 2", in light of the first historic dialogue between the Church and SPLM in Kajiko town in 1997. It will be supplemented by other programs to bring peace, reconciliation and healing in the nation.
- To set up a task force to analyse the situation in Sudan and advise the Church on how

to respond quickly to events.

- To engage with national, regional and international bodies, including the Governments of National Unity and Southern Sudan, neighbouring governments and churches, AU, IGAD, Arab League, EU, UN, and key governments such as USA, UK and Norway, for lobby and advocacy to explain the feelings of southerners and people from the marginalised areas and their likely reaction to events, and provide guidance on what to do.
- To inform and work with these international and regional partners on the position of the Church in northern Sudan; to empower the Church in the north to sustain itself, whatever the result of the referenda; and to review the structure of the Sudan Council of Churches in the light of the emerging situation.
- To engage with all stakeholders within Sudan, including traditional authorities, political parties, civil society, and other faiths.
- Having learned from the recently concluded national elections, we appreciate the civic education which was done at the grassroots and other levels but there is need to do much more in preparation for the referenda. Lessons have been learned. As it became clear during elections, there was confusion in some voting centres, difficulties in registration of names, confusion of election symbols and huge logistic problems. We as a church therefore undertake to increase our role in civic education, awareness raising and monitoring on referenda and popular consultations.

The Sudanese Church commits itself to speak the truth fearlessly, and to continue its Gospel-led mission to give a voice to the voiceless, the poor and the marginalised, and addressing issues of national concern. We would like to assure the Sudanese people and the world at large that we shall continue to fulfil this God-given role as a prophetic voice and a positive instrument of peace, equality and justice for all.