

THABO MBEKI

Message from Thabo Mbeki, Chairman, AUHIP to the Sudan Council of Churches (SCC) and Sudan Ecumenical Forum (SEF) Conference, "Kajiko II: Church and Government of Southern Sudan' Forum on Peace and Reconciliation": Juba, 28 September 2010.

**Spiritual and Political Leaders of Southern Sudan,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen:**

On behalf of the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel for Sudan, and the African Union more widely, I extend our support to you in this important meeting. This conference comes barely one hundred days before the people of southern Sudan are scheduled to make their historic decision, on unity or secession, in the Referendum which is the fulfilment of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

At the time when the CPA was signed, the people of southern Sudan had spent more than forty years in the wilderness. In bringing peace between northern and southern Sudan, that Agreement enabled the people of southern Sudan to enjoy peace on their own land, which had been ravaged by war and famine.

Peace enabled those who had been driven as refugees to every corner of the world, or who had been displaced internally, to return home. It enabled those who had stayed within southern Sudan, and indeed the generation of young people who had been born during the long years of war, to begin to know one another, often for the first time.

Five or six years is a short period of time for a people, scattered and traumatised by many decades of war and disruption, to achieve reconciliation and build a society anew. The decision that the voters of southern Sudan will take in January, is one important step towards fulfilling the aspirations of the southern Sudanese people. There are many other steps too.

The true meaning of self-determination is to be found not only in a decision on the sovereign status of a people, but also in achieving peace and reconciliation, and

building a democratic and capable government that can promote the welfare and protect the rights of the people. The true work of self-determination will continue for years to come.

In this context, we warmly welcome and strongly endorse the initiative of the Churches of southern Sudan in taking these steps towards reconciliation and internal peace. It is vitally important that all communities in southern Sudan, civil society, women and youth, come together and work together, in partnership with the Government of Southern Sudan which was elected earlier this year.

The immediate challenge facing the people and leaders of southern Sudan is to establish an environment conducive to the holding of a free and fair Referendum in January. It is important that the preparations for the Referendum proceed expeditiously and to the highest standard. It is essential that a free and fair campaign be held, in which the options of unity and secession are presented to the voters to enable them to choose freely.

We encourage the Government of Southern Sudan, the Churches, the media and civil society, to make every effort to educate the people about the Referendum, the choice before the voters, and the high importance attached to the credibility of the process of preparation, campaigning, voting and counting of the votes.

Like you, we have repeatedly emphasised the importance of holding the Referendum on time. Equally, we have emphasised, and continue to insist upon the importance of a peaceful and credible Referendum conducted according to the highest possible standards.

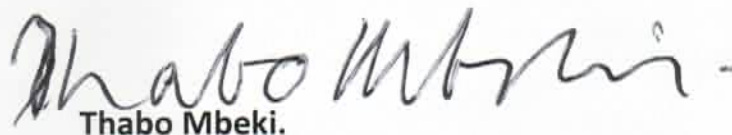
Africa stands in solidarity with the people of southern Sudan at this historic moment. As Africa stood by the people of Sudan during their long years of war, extending the hand of hospitality and solidarity, so too, Africa shares in the blessings of peace, and the triumph that is the exercise of the will of the people, through the Referendum, and the implementation of the decision of the people.

In the months and years after the Referendum, the people of southern Sudan will continue to face many challenges, to build a peaceful, prosperous and inclusive society, whether as part of a united Sudan or as a newly independent nation. The agenda for discussion at this Conference reflects many of the tasks that need to be undertaken.

It will only be through the involvement of the entire society, all sections of the community, in partnership with the Government of Southern Sudan, that success will be possible. Religious leaders will necessarily play a vital role in promoting and sustaining this partnership and enabling the people of southern Sudan to become truly the masters of their own destiny.

I am encouraged by the leadership role taken on by the Sudan Council of Churches and the Sudan Ecumenical Forum, represented by this important Conference. I wish you every success in your deliberations.

Although unfortunately it has not been possible, on this occasion, for me or the other Members of the African Union High Level Implementation Panel for Sudan to be present in Juba to participate in the Conference, we shall remain closely in touch with your deliberations, your decisions, and your follow up activities. We wish you success in your important work.


Thabo Mbeki.