



Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development Office of International Justice and Peace

Background on South Sudan **January 2016**

“The commitment to create a climate of constructive social creativity must prevail over selfishness and the thirst for power, with a clear recognition that human beings, with their legitimate moral, ethical, and social aspirations, are always prior to the State and the various powers which might in some way seek to subject them”.

--Letter from Pope Francis to Archbishop Lukudu Loro, 2014

BACKGROUND

After 18 months of civil war and six failed agreements, the two parties to the conflict in South Sudan signed a peace agreement that took effect on August 29, 2015. The armed conflict had broken out in the wake of a deep split along ethnic lines within the ruling South Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) party and the SPLA military over access to power and resources. The government faction and the military are led by President Salva Kiir and the opposition party (SPLM-IO) and militia are led by former Vice President Riek Machar.

The regional 8-country Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), supported by donor nations, brokered the peace deal. The agreement calls for a transitional government with Salva Kiir as President and Riek Machar as first Vice President. Many of the other past government members have rejoined the transitional institution as well. The agreement establishes a Truth and Reconciliation Committee, a Hybrid Court to try higher level crimes, and a compensation fund to help those who suffered losses. The transitional government is to revise the constitution, reform the military, and set up and manage the electoral process that will lead to a new government with legitimacy. The two parties agreed to a complete redeployment of their troops in and around Juba, the capital, in order to ensure security for both parties, but to date have failed to respect this commitment. As a result, the government has not been formed and the parties have implemented very few of the agreement’s stipulations while sporadic ceasefire violations continue upcountry.

The civil war has crippled the country’s economy. The official currency exchange rate is 3 Sudanese Pounds to 1 U.S. Dollar, but on the black market it is now almost 20 to 1. Oil represents 99% of exports and over 90% of government revenues. The fall in the international price of oil and the reduction in oil exports means that the government is now running a large deficit. Because donors are not willing to lend the government money, the deficit is covered by printing money. This is creating inflation that negatively affects those living in cities and deepens poverty. The price of a liter of gasoline has gone from 8 pounds to 60 while many stations are closed due to acute shortages of fuel.

The UN reports that 1.54 million people have been displaced; 7.9 million out of a population of about 12 million face hunger while 4.9 million are severely food insecure. More than half a million are refugees in neighboring countries. The International Crisis Group reports that at least 50,000 people have lost their lives. The UN also says that it needs \$1.81 billion to cover emergency needs, yet has only received \$210 million. In 2014, the United States committed over \$422 million in assistance to South Sudan, and of that amount, \$184.6 million was for emergency assistance, up from \$86.7 million in 2013. The United States warns of more limited and targeted sanctions against political leaders if they do not stop

the violence and has threatened to expand those sanctions to anyone who supports violence or sabotages the peace agreement.

Catholic Relief Services has committed \$5 million over the next five years and has mobilized millions of dollars of assistance from other donors for humanitarian relief, recovery activities and peacebuilding. CRS and its partners are providing shelter and household goods to 33,000 people, and seeds, tools, water and sanitation facilities to another 7,000. The Jonglei Food Security Program, co-funded with the U.S. Government, is working in the conflict zone to address serious hunger among 356,000 people as well as to build longer term food security programs to prevent hunger. CRS is one of the many Catholic donors assisting the South Sudan Council of Churches' program to promote national dialogue and reconciliation. CRS is also working with the Committee on National Healing, Peace, and Reconciliation (CNHPR) to finance its efforts to train 550 people to conduct a nationwide consultation process in all local government districts. The National Committee, whose mandate will end in April 2016, will make recommendations on a reconciliation process to a new group led by the South Sudan Council of Churches.

During his visit to Uganda in November last year, Pope Francis held a private meeting with President Salva Kiir to discuss the crisis in South Sudan. No public statements were issued, but Vatican officials stated that the Holy Father hoped to promote a return to peace and reconciliation.

The Catholic Church in South Sudan has been an outspoken witness for dialogue and peace. The Church is now intervening in its capacity as a member of the South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC). In July 2015, SSCC issued a statement that supported the new peace agreement and strongly urged the political leaders to sign it. SSCC proposes holding a forum where the political leaders can meet to build trust and find common ground. They also hope to restart an international advocacy initiative with their respective faith communities in donor nations to increase international engagement towards peace. SSCC will also set up a structure to promote reconciliation and social cohesion in towns and communities across the country.

USCCB Policy

USCCB and CRS have actively supported the Church and people of South Sudan. Bishop Cantú made a solidarity visit to South Sudan in July 2015. In September, Bishop Cantú wrote a letter to Secretary of State John Kerry and National Security Adviser Susan Rice to urge them to refrain from imposing new sanctions and to work with the government of South Sudan to encourage them to fully implement the recently signed peace agreement. In September and October, Committee staff met with the new SSCC Chairman and Presbyterian Moderator, Reverend Peter Gai, to discuss the implementation of the agreement and the ongoing work of SSCC. On two separate occasions staff have met with State Department officials and leaders in Congress to urge them to support the implementation of the new peace agreement.

The Church in South Sudan, USCCB and CRS continue to urge the U.S. Government to:

- Refrain from imposing further sanctions as counterproductive;
- Intensify positive efforts to support the implementation of the peace agreement;
- Provide robust funding for humanitarian, recovery and peacebuilding programs;
- Support peacekeeping and conflict monitoring efforts to end the sporadic fighting; and
- Fund efforts to promote dialogue and reconciliation by CRS, the Catholic Church and the SSCC.