



The Ecumenical Network on South Sudan (ENSS) Joint Statement

Ecumenical Pilgrimage of the Pope, Archbishop of Canterbury, and Moderator of the Church of Scotland, for Love, Hope, Peace, Justice, Forgiveness, Reconciliation and Unity, February 2023

"I pray that all may be one" (Jn 17)

As South Sudan celebrates the upcoming ecumenical pilgrimage of the Pope, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the Moderator of the Church of Scotland, we, members of the Ecumenical Network on South Sudan, and the South Sudan Council of Churches, join them in their prayer for unity that "all may be one" (John 17) across South Sudan.

We pray that the leaders of the Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian and Evangelical churches will embody the spirit of this historic pilgrimage for love, hope, peace, justice, forgiveness, reconciliation, and unity, with the support of the Church worldwide, and raise up the people of South Sudan during this pilgrimage. The commitments made between these leaders, and leaders within South Sudan's Presidency, at the retreat in Rome in 2019, paved the way to this pilgrimage, and those bold and courageous commitments frame the future path to peace, and must endure.

The Ecumenical Network on South Sudan walks alongside the South Sudan Council of Churches as it facilitates the coming together of church leaders and supports the unity of the Church in South Sudan across denominations, and political and ethnic divides - a unity which may help us envision an increasingly unified South Sudan.

We note the multiple challenges on the path to holistic peace, unity, justice, and reconciliation, including the impact of poverty, climate change, Covid-19 and conflict.

Peace: Implementation of the peace agreement, the Roadmap to the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) faces continued delays. We welcome the recent finalisation of the unification of forces but cannot ignore the escalation in the frequency and intensity of armed conflicts and inter communal violence, as witnessed particularly in the last few months of 2022 in Upper Nile State and parts of Central Equatoria. Political divisions have exacerbated this. Disunity within key signatories to the peace agreement must be healed, or risk continuing to cast a veil of ambiguity over the agreement. We welcomed the glimmer of hope in April as the SPLM and SPLM-IO agreed on a quota for leadership within the national security structures. We call on all parties, signatories and non-signatories to the R-ARCSS, to end the violence and deepen their dialogue to ensure that conflicts are resolved through nonviolent means.

Unity: While the Transitional National Legislative Assembly has been established, we welcome the Presidency's affirmation that South Sudan's first ever elections will take place. South Sudan needs free and fair elections to support implementation of the peace agreement. This is even more critical as political tensions and violence have escalated, and civil society remains alarmed by restrictions in civic space and the increase in detention and harassment this past year. We note that much needs to be achieved to ensure that the apparatus for elections is put in place.

Justice: We call for a renewal of the mandate of the UN Human Rights Commission on South Sudan and call on all relevant parties to engage effectively in full and fair investigations led by the Commission during this critical year, which is essential to underpin any future capacity support. We call for concrete steps to be taken to establish the Hybrid Court in the coming year. Alongside this, transparency in revenues, including oil, and the use of those revenues, must be redoubled through concrete measures engaging the legislature and the Ministry of Finance. This is essential to ensure improved access to quality basic services and vital infrastructure.

Reconciliation, and preventing further conflict: We welcome the on-going consultations for the Commission on Truth, Healing and Reconciliation, and we renew our call for a nation-wide and systemic approach to peacebuilding and reconciliation, so critical to address the trauma that continues to divide, and to prevent further conflict. It is clear that investment in nation-wide and multi-level reconciliation is now a life-saving action. We must build from existing community level agreements, ensure we invest in both reaction to hotspot areas where there is an escalation in violence, and in the recovery of these areas which is so critical to the sustainability of these agreements. Throughout, this requires systematic and in-depth engagement of youth and women, to ensure that they can be more meaningfully engaged in peace processes, and not only in the implementation of the R-ARCSS.

It is likely that 9.4 million people will be in need of humanitarian assistance in 2023 – over 70% of the whole population of South Sudan. Communities are still recovering from conflict, Covid and multiple years of flooding, with household assets and coping mechanisms depleted. Yet attention and resources are being diverted from South Sudan, partly due to UN scale-ups in quick succession for Afghanistan, Ethiopia, and Ukraine. The need for anticipatory action is clear in communities experiencing “crisis” levels of food insecurity, yet we see a depletion in aid in these areas due to scarce resources being moved to areas with emergency and famine levels. We call for governments worldwide to renew their focus on South Sudan, ensure they both retain resources for those that are in food crisis, try to prevent further deterioration, and increase support to those on the verge of facing catastrophe or extreme food insecurity. With the climate crisis a significant driver of food insecurity, we also call on governments to implement without delay the commitments made at COP26 and COP27 UN climate summits.

The Ecumenical Network on South Sudan joins church leaders from across South Sudan. Along with them, we pledge to continue our efforts to help bring about a lasting “just peace” in South Sudan through our support to spiritual renewal, advocacy, dialogue, reconciliation, and trauma healing, while encouraging all non-violent means to bringing this positive change in society.

With the committed support of the international community, we must redouble our humanitarian, peacebuilding and diplomatic efforts. Further suffering can be prevented if action is taken now, turning our attention away from this will cost lives and fast.

Despite these setbacks, decades of marginalisation, bitter conflict, and fear and oppression, we are committed to redoubling our efforts in support of the people of South Sudan, and our common hope for a united and peaceful nation remains as firm as ever. We call for our brothers and sisters in the global Church, in the Church across South Sudan, and for governments worldwide to turn their attention to South Sudan during this historical pilgrimage and join us in strengthening efforts and resources to support the people of South Sudan in their work of renewal and transformation, as they restore hope and continue to build a peaceful, just and thriving nation.



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