

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS FOR 2008 PARTNERS' CONFERENCE IN SALISBURY
BY THE MOST REVD DR DANIEL DENG BUL, ARCHBISHOP AND PRIMATE OF
THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF THE SUDAN**

Dear Friends of the Province of the Episcopal Church of the Sudan, Brothers and Sisters in Christ, I greet you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I bring you many greetings from ECS and the whole Christian community in the Sudan. On behalf of our bishops and the entire Sudanese Church, and on my own behalf, I take this opportunity to thank you, especially those who have sacrificed in supporting the church in Sudan through the period of 21 years of war.

This Conference is a very special venture. It is a wonderful thing for us to have our partners and friends come together from many different places and corners of the world. We are very grateful to the Diocese of Salisbury - who organizing and hosting this conference. We are very grateful to all of you for accepting their invitation and for travelling to be with us in this beautiful city. We greatly value our friends in the Spirit: you have walked alongside us during the most difficult times for the Sudanese people. You have prayed for us and given us moral and material support and have helped lead us into the considerable peace which we are enjoying today.

BACKGROUND ON SUDAN SITUATION

We give thanks to God for the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement / Army (SPLM/A) on 9th January 2005. This provides us with the basis for a just and sustainable peace in the Sudan. Not everything has gone ahead smoothly, but we are doing whatever we can to ensure it is properly implemented.

The Referendum to be held in 2011 on the future political status of the South is central to the CPA. As the Church, we affirm the right of every human being to decide his or her destiny and so we support the right of self-determination for the people of Southern Sudan to decide their future, whether for unity or separation. We have committed ourselves to raise awareness of the Referendum, as well as the whole CPA, to make sure that the process is carried out with proper transparency.

But we are still deeply concerned about the situation in Darfur. The conflict there is as intractable and serious as ever, and in May even reached up to Khartoum. We are also very concerned at fighting in several places in the South, which threatens stability and also threatens the peace agreement. We are particularly concerned about Abyei, an oil-rich area on the border between Northern and Southern Sudan. In May this year, the town was completely destroyed, displacing the population of more than 90,000 people from the town and its surrounding area. This was the most serious violation of the CPA to date. This follows the Khartoum Government's repeated refusal to recognize the Abyei Boundary Commission as provided by CPA, and its delay in forming an administration for the area. Flashpoints such as these risk endangering the entire peace agreement.

CHALLENGES FACING THE CHURCH

The Province of the Episcopal Church of the Sudan has been part of these struggles towards peace, justice and democracy. It has not been easy as the Church has lived right through the experience of war, injustice, religious persecution and marginalization. The Church in the Sudan has survived for many years but it has not escaped unscathed. A number of problems have been inherited. Some of these challenges are man made and we need to approach them by joining hands together, praying together and sharing the burden of the Christian population, especially in the mission of the Church.

My being elected as the 4th Archbishop is a new beginning of a new Episcopal Church of the Sudan; I am very thankful for the contribution of my predecessor, the Most Rev'd Dr Joseph Marona who led the church through the difficult war years until his body was quite worn out. We wish him well and he and his wife good health in their retirement. I am proud to lead the ECS into a new era. I need and appreciate your prayers, support and cooperation to enable me to accomplish the task to which I have been called. As I said at my enthronement, I have a dream and I want you to dream with me. Let us restore hope, peace and justice to the people of Sudan and bring about reconciliation.

The Prophet Nehemiah had a vision to bring his people back home and resettle them in a new nation and that vision prompted him to mobilize his people for prayers and put together a God given plan of action for the new nation in the making. Nehemiah was aware of the dangers ahead of him and so he combined prayers and the action plan together.

Through prayers, God directs and guides our preparations, teamwork and diligent efforts. That is why it is important as a leader like Nehemiah to listen to God's guidance. He was aware of the difficulties in the resettlement of his people and the process of establishing the new nation and so he was ready to face the problems as they come. It was through difficulties that Nehemiah rebuilt and restored the new nation of Israel.

The key to their success was repentance from their sins which was characterized in the way Nehemiah prayed. God desires from us total repentance, then we can expect transformation, spiritually and physically, and henceforth the healing of the land. For us to rebuild Southern Sudan, Nuba Mountains and Southern Blue Nile, and even Northern Sudan, we must share a vision to build our Church and our nation.

Dear partners, I have a vision of holiness and I wish together with you to transform our country into holiness. Our role as the Church is to see to it that we live in peace, love and unity. We are to work hard to help our communities to love each other under our motherland, a new Sudan for all.

For us to be effective there are a number of immediate challenges we need to address:

1. PROVINCIAL ARREARS

The Province of the Episcopal Church of the Sudan has inherited arrears and unpaid incentives for staff of the Province in Juba and Khartoum. These arrears need to be cleared as soon as possible and provision be found for sustaining the level of staffing needed for running the Province.

2. COMMUNICATION FOR THE OFFICE OF ARCHBISHOP

Communication remains a major challenge within Sudan. The Province lacks effective communication systems and needs modern equipment to be able to communicate effectively both with the dioceses and internationally.

3. PROVINCIAL OFFICE REFURBISHMENT

No major refurbishment has taken place since the Province of the Episcopal Church of the Sudan was created in 1974. New furniture is needed as well as overdue repairs and refurbishment.

4. EVANGELISM

For the Gospel to be preached to the whole Sudan, evangelism needs to be strengthened and supported. Expanding the work of evangelism will make the Church rich in its harvest and able to reach other parts of Sudan and beyond. The Evangelism Commission needs to develop equipment to support such activities, including sound systems, a generator and vehicle for reaching the different centres.

5. PEACE-BUILDING, RECONCILIATION AND ADVOCACY

The civil war in Sudan has caused trauma to thousands of people and had a serious effect on families and friends during the war. The ECS Justice, Peace and Reconciliation Commission has been holding workshops in many different parts of the Sudan to enlighten communities and help them move from a culture of war towards building peace with one another. There is an urgent need to intensify these activities.

6. REHABILITATION AND RELIEF FOR IDPs AND RETURNEES

Over the last 22 years, our people have fled as refugees to all our neighbouring countries and beyond. Sudan has also experienced major internal displacement of our populations, especially from the South to the North, and from the East. More recently, huge numbers have been displaced and rendered homeless in the West in the region of Darfur, because of the conflict. The Church has a major part to play in helping to rehabilitate returnees, including those now returning from Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Egypt, Congo and Central African Republic. Such care sets a good example and is a practical demonstration of the Gospel message.

7. AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY

In terms of food production, Sudan could be a bread basket for the whole of Africa. Our God-given land is rich in both minerals and agricultural soil. Rainfall is up to 60 inches per year but we lack equipment, modern farming techniques and seeds. Conservation of the environment is important for the future. We would welcome overseas volunteers with professional expertise to help the church to develop appropriate modern farming techniques and educate local farmers.

8. EDUCATION

Throughout the history of ECS, the church has been at the forefront of developing education policy. This has been a rich inheritance from the work of CMS and has widely benefitted the Sudanese people. Education remains a central element of the church's mission and critical for the future of the nation. Sudan still has a very long way to go to achieve universal primary education, although education is a right according to the Geneva Convention. The ECS Education Commission has established policies for primary schools and for teacher training, as well as seeking to encourage secondary and technical / vocational education. ECS is one of the major providers of education, especially in Southern Sudan, but the needs to be met extend far beyond this.

9. HEALTH

ECS has established a Commission for Health and HIV/AIDS. The level of healthcare available inside Sudan is minimal, particularly in the South. With the help of partners, particularly the Salisbury Medical Link, ECS Dioceses have been able to offer some basic primary health care, but the needs are enormous. Meanwhile diseases prevalent in Sudan such as HIV/AIDS and Malaria have become of global concern. Much work is needed in this area.

10. CAPACITY BUILDING AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

21 years of war in Sudan have been a tremendous setback for the availability of educated and trained personnel, both to serve as leaders of the church and in other disciplines. ECS has suffered from this lack of leadership skills as has every walk of life. There is an important need now to take training seriously to overcome this gap. Priorities for ECS include:

- Theological training;
- General capacity building for leaders;
- Development training for parishes, dioceses, and the Provincial staff.

11. RECONSTRUCTION OF CHURCHES

Most of the Churches in Sudan were burnt down during the civil war. There is a need to rebuild churches and dioceses. Samaritan's Purse is the only organization which has volunteered to rebuild some of the churches on a cost-sharing basis with the local Christian community who provide bricks, timbers and the labour force. Additional support is needed to address this difficult challenge.

12. PROFESSIONAL MISSION PERSONNEL

The Episcopal Church of the Sudan is requesting you to give us a helping hand in training our people in the different disciplines needed to address the needs of our people and equip the church in its mission. We need professional expertise, such as teachers, agriculturalists, nurses, doctors, and other technical experts.

Friends, we have only come out of a situation of civil war two or three years ago. We have been enjoying this peace because of your solidarity and support. Now is the time when we need to lead our people towards sustainability. The 2011 Referendum is approaching to determine the destiny of our people in the Sudan. We need to walk together, pray together and support one another in the context of all these challenges.

The time has come for all our dioceses to be linked to partner dioceses so as to strengthen the relationships amongst Christians in our different countries and within the one body of Christ.

I end here by using an African Proverb quoting Professor John Mbiti: "I am because you are"... "We are because you are." (African Religion and Philosophy)



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