



# AFRICA- **Sudan** - unite or divide



## Justice Briefing No 10

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Matthew 5:9*



“Your vote counts” - promoting the participation of Women in the southern Sudan Referendum

### Bishops call for Peace

The quotation below is from a recent statement made by the Southern Sudan Catholic Bishops Conference. It sums up the current situation and also the fact that in the future some sort of *modus vivendi* needs to exist between north and south Sudan no matter what the result of the forthcoming voting.

*“Southerners fear a unity which binds and oppresses, prohibits all forms of opposition and which imposes uniformity; northerners fear secession. Mutually beneficial compromises must be reached over issues such as oil, borders and citizenship. Southerners will continue to live in the north and northerners in the south. Churches and mosques will continue in both the north and the south.”*

In their statement the Bishops also called for voting to take place on schedule, that it should be free, fair and that the results be respected. They also highlighted the need for minorities in both Northern and Southern Sudan be recognized and protected in accordance with the international provisions of law.

Acknowledging that preparations for the referendum are far behind schedule the bishops expressed the fear that a failure to offer the people the chance to determine their own future could lead to another civil war in Sudan.

The Bishops of Sudan have also called Catholics all over the world **to pray, to learn about, to advocate and also to give financially in support peace in Sudan.**

- see reverse.

### SUDAN at a Crossroads

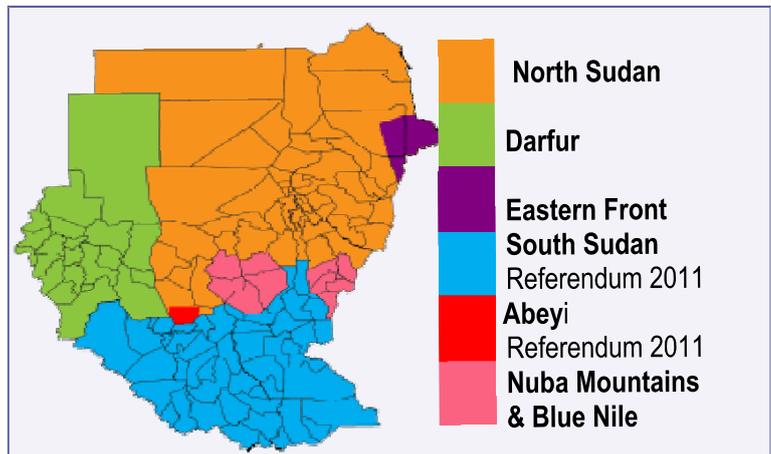
Time has come for the people of southern Sudan to exercise their right to self-determination through an internationally monitored referendum scheduled to take place on 9th January 2011.

In fact two separate votes are due to take place, one in southern Sudan to decide if the region secedes or remains part of Sudan and the second in the oil-rich Abyei area to decide whether it becomes part of either a northern or southern state. These votes were central pillars in the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement that ended Sudan’s twenty-two year civil war.

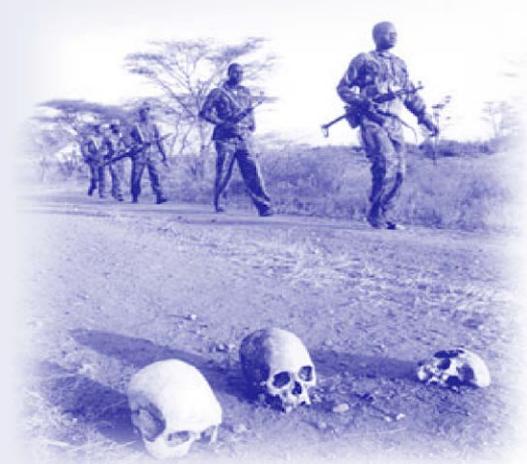
There are fears that if things go badly, e.g. through cancellation or disagreement about the ballot results, that war will resume and that this time, countries bordering Sudan will be drawn into a conflict that could engulf the region in a war divided along ethnic and religious lines. Already both sides have accused each other of building up troops along the north-south divide. Preparations for voting have proceeded amid political and logistical obstacles. Southerners have accused northerners of deliberately blocking progress, warning of violence if the referendum is delayed.

It now seems almost certain that the Abyei referendum will be delayed as the Commission to oversee it has not yet been established and there is no agreement on whether members of the Misseriya, a big pro-northern and pro-unity nomadic tribe which grazes its cattle in the south during the dry season, are eligible to vote. Their inclusion is contested by the Ngok Dinka the residential majority in Abyei. What effect a postponement or delay in the Abyei vote would have remains to be seen. However, it is clear that neither side wants to lose the oil rich area. It could therefore become a flashpoint for future conflict. If, as seems likely, the result is a vote for secession there will still be many contentious issues to be settled, these include border demarcation, wealth sharing, water, citizenship and how to deal with the national debt.

The above is a brief overview of a complicated situation made even more so by Darfur and by the status of other areas such as the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile. The cliché “being on a knife edge” applies very well to Sudan. **What happens in January 2011 will determine its future direction and whether or not the results are respected will decide between war and peace.**



## CIVIL WAR - Sudan's History



In recent years Sudan became the focus of world attention due to what has been described as genocide in Darfur. It is estimated that over 300,000 people died and a further three million have been made homeless.

However, even before violence was visited on Darfur, civil war has sporadically gone on for decades between the Muslim government in Khartoum and secessionist Christians and animists in the South. The dividing lines for this conflict were drawn during Britain's 1899-1956 colonial rule. Arab culture, language and Islam were promoted in the North, while a policy of Tribalisation and Christianisation was introduced in the South. In the post colonial era this division was exacerbated by Khartoum's exploitation, failure to develop and its attempts to impose Shariah law in the south. The long north-south conflict was an even greater humanitarian tragedy than Darfur is now. It left two million dead and millions more displaced.

The book "Sudan, Darfur and the failure of an African State" describes Sudan's history since independence in 1956 as "a long series of armed struggles between the centre of the country and the peripheries – Darfur, the south and the east - as people fight to claim what they feel is theirs from a self-absorbed ruling elite in Khartoum."

## The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA)

Decades of civil-war ended with the CPA signed between the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and the Government of Sudan in January 2005. A key element in the agreement was that the unity of Sudan should be given a chance and made attractive to the people of Southern Sudan by addressing the root causes of conflict that were identified as:

- The failure to achieve a national identity and unity that guaranteed and protected the fundamental rights of the multi-ethnic and multi-religious society of the Sudan.
- The highly centralized system of government controlled by a small ethnic group which had imposed its system of administration on the whole country through islamization of the laws, institutions and political systems.

The CPA brought peace through power sharing on a national level and allowing a separate Government in Southern Sudan. Shariah law would not apply to non-Muslims. Oil wealth would be split 50:42 between north and south with small percentages allocated to states and ethnic groups..

The Agreement also specified two referendums after a six year "interim period". The people of south Sudan would vote on unity or secession and the people of the oil producing Abyei area would vote either to be part of the north or the south.

The "interim period" agreed to address the causes of conflict is now drawing to a close and time for the referenda draws near. Indications are that national unity has not been made attractive to the people of Southern Sudan and that the root-causes of conflict have not been addressed. It is, therefore, widely expected that the people of south Sudan will vote for secession.

## BUILDING PEACE - The Christian Response

The Catholic Church in Sudan is urgently engaged in preventing conflict through peace building efforts and education aimed at defusing tensions as the Referendum approaches. These efforts centre on reviving customary ways of settling disputes over land, resources and access to water, as well as education on innovative, contemporary non-violent methods of resolving conflict. For example, in areas where people are fighting over water, Wells are being dug with funding from the Catholic Relief Service. Where groups disagree about land boundaries, the Church is bringing both parties together to discuss the issues civilly and come to an agreement. A Radio Station is being used to counter false and inflammatory information, to get the facts out and develop creative programming such as radio dramas that demonstrate how people can peacefully resolve conflicts.

**At the end of the holocaust in Europe the world vowed never again, after the genocide in Rwanda the world said never again – now is the time to raise our voices and to intervene in Sudan because never again begins now. We can help by answering the call of the Bishops of Sudan to pray, to learn about Sudan, and also to advocate for and by giving to support peace in Sudan. See <http://peaceinsudan.crs.org/>**

## PRAYER FOR SUDAN

*Lord Jesus, you said to us; "I leave you peace. My peace I give you." Look upon us your sisters and brothers in Sudan as we face this moment of referendum. Send us your Spirit to guide us. Give us the wisdom we need to choose our future where we will know your true peace. You call us out of slavery, oppression, and persecution so that we may have life in abundance. Grant us peace with one another. Give peace among ethnic groups. Help us to work together for the good of all. We ask this in your name, Jesus our Lord. Amen.*

Prayer for Peace in Sudan approved by the Sudan Catholic Bishops Conference, 2010

