

**The Ecumenical Network on South Sudan (ENSS)
Europe and North America Hub**

Christmas message 2021

*Lightning a Candle of Hope amidst darkness:
an ecumenical call for nonviolence and just peace in South Sudan*

The past year has brought many challenges for the people of South Sudan, especially for women and youth. Despite the revitalized peace agreement, whose implementation lags behind, violence continues to ravage the country, bringing loss of life, displacement, and despair. The impact of climate change is acutely felt, with over 800,000 people affected by flooding, beyond previous levels. Grave food insecurity persists, with 8.3 million people projected to need humanitarian assistance this year, and 483,000 women malnourished¹. Throughout 2021, COVID-19 has continued to have a negative impact globally, and South Sudan is no exception; beyond the associated illness and tragic loss of life, increased food prices, a rise in violence against women and girls, and a detrimental impact on access to health services, are compounding the effects of the virus.

As we approach the Light of Christmas, we, members of the ENSS in Europe and North America, express our deep solidarity with the people of South Sudan, particularly youth and women, the Church and its council the South Sudan Council of Churches, civil society, leaders and all those that work for peace, justice, and in denouncing violence on a daily basis. We share in the hope of this festive season, with sure trust in the Lord to continue bringing light where there is darkness.

We call for nonviolence and a just peace², for leaders to implement the revitalized peace agreement in heart and spirit towards an inclusive peace, and reaffirm our commitment to journey with the Church, its Council and the people of South Sudan.

We also take this opportunity to reflect, in hope, on developments over the past year. We support the decision by the Swedish judicial authorities to hold representatives of Lundin Energy to account for their actions – representatives have been indicted for aiding and abetting war crimes in South Sudan in the early 2000s. We support the Church and its Council that stood with affected communities twenty years ago and still does today. We wait with hope that proceedings will bring truth and justice for communities involved, paving the road for reconciliation.

We call upon stakeholders in our own countries – officials, government representatives, and those who engage with South Sudan on various platforms – to continue to strive to keep South Sudan high on the international humanitarian and diplomatic communities' agenda, and support the South Sudan Council of Churches' Action Plan for Peace, the grassroots justice and peace initiatives of the church civil society women and youth groups. We must not turn our backs on the people of South Sudan, we must renew and reinvigorate diplomatic and financial efforts to support communities of the world's newest nation. We continue to stand with the people of South Sudan.

This Christmas period, we lift the nation to God, in hope and prayer that the people of South Sudan may live in harmony, unity, and peace.

¹ UN OCHA South Sudan Humanitarian Snapshot November 2021:

https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/south_sudan_humanitarian_snapshot_november_0.pdf

² "No longer legitimizing war: Christians and Just Peace" by Rose Marie Berger, 2016. Just Peace is a Christian school of thought and set of practices for building sustainable peace, including at all stages of acute conflict- before, during, and after. It is maintained through key approaches of principles, norms and ethics and is characterized by the presence of social, economic and political conditions that prevent a return to violence.

Act Church of Sweden, CAFOD, Christian aid UK, Christian Council of Norway, Church of Scotland, Danish Church Aid, Kairos Canada, PAX, PMU/ Pingstmissionens utvecklingssamarbete, Presbyterian Church USA, Norwegian Church Aid, Tearfund, Trocaire.

