

**Communique, *Be calm but vigilant...*** (1 Peter 5:8)

We the Sudan Catholic Bishops' Conference, gathered in Extraordinary Plenary assembly in Juba, South Sudan, from 1<sup>st</sup> - 7<sup>th</sup> April 2011, have prayed and reflected together on the situation in our beloved Sudan. Mindful of our responsibility as prophets and shepherds at this crucial time, we offer you these words of encouragement and advice during the Season of Lent as we anticipate the Easter Joy of the Resurrection.

In a previous statement, we said, *Sudan will never be the same again*. This has come to pass in the most concrete way, as we await the formal Declaration of Independence of the South and the formation of two new countries on 9<sup>th</sup> July 2011. However it is also true in a deeper way. The people of the South have had the opportunity to determine their own political future. This is a basic expression of human dignity. We call upon all the citizens, politicians, security forces and leaders of the two countries to respect human life and dignity, and to build the future based on these God-given values.

We call for patience, understanding and restraint as this dramatic change takes place. Those in authority must act justly, and foster openness and participation in spirit and action. Citizens must recognise that great changes are not completed overnight; there is a process which may not always meet immediate expectations. Legitimate authority must be respected, but leaders must work selflessly for the common good and avoid exaggerated political ambition. Leadership is a service to the people, and offices must be surrendered willingly at the end of the requisite term.

While there is great joy, there are also those who are saddened at the division of our country. There are fears and concerns about the future. Problems still remain: Abyei, the Nuba Mountains, Blue Nile, citizenship, borders and oil. There are concerns about the inclusivity and transparency of the constitutional review process. Not least, the conflict in Darfur continues and there is increasing violence in the South, including the activities of the Lord's Resistance Army. We are saddened that our people have been inculturated to turn to violence when faced with disputes, whether ethnic, or over resources, or over personal or political issues.

We urge all parties, all forces and all citizens to embrace a culture of peace and to reject violence. We call upon them to turn away from division, incitement, hate speech, rumours and accusations and to resolve disputes through dialogue in a spirit of unity. We are all children of God, regardless of geographical boundaries, ethnicity, religion, culture, or political affiliation, and we insist on respect for diversity. The advice we gave during the 101 days of prayer for a peaceful referendum is as valid now and for the future as it was then: *change your heart, change the world* – and change Sudan. Only thus will a just and peaceful new society be built in our two new countries.

Any major change is a time of uncertainty and potential instability. We encourage you to embrace it positively and peacefully, with joy and patience, as we would await the birth of a new baby, in order to secure the peaceful and prosperous future we all want for ourselves and generations yet to come. We, your Pastors, assure you of our prayers and our continued accompaniment and guidance.

*Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice. Mend your ways, encourage one another, agree with one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you.* (2 Corinthians 13:11)

Through the intercession of Saints Josephine Bakhita and Daniel Comboni, may God bless you all.