

Communiqué on the Refugees Crisis and Peace Process in South Sudan

Regional Church Leaders representing various councils of churches from East Africa Region including South Sudan and other parts of Africa met at a conference held at Garuga Country Resort Hotel near Entebbe, Uganda, on 8-9 June, 2017 under the theme “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11). The conference was hosted by Uganda Joint Christian Council (UJCC) in conjunction with South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC) and the Council of Anglican Provinces in Africa (CAPA). Messages of solidarity and goodwill were received from the Fellowship of Councils and Churches in the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa (FECCLAHA), All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and the representative of the Archbishop Canterbury. During the conference, the Church Leaders discussed a wide range of issues ranging from the plight of South Sudanese refugees living in the refugees’ settlements in Uganda and those in other areas as well as the SSCC Action Plan for Peace (APP) and other initiatives aimed at restoring stability and bringing about sustainable peace in South Sudan.

The conference was preceded by a three-day visit to the refugees’ settlements in Northern Uganda (Bidibidi, Rhino Camp, Adjumani and Lamwo) and Kiryandongo in Western Uganda. During these visits, the church leaders met and held discussions with a cross-section of South Sudanese refugees including women, men and the youth who shared heartrending experiences including pain and trauma occasioned by the loss of their loved ones some of whom were killed due to the conflict; pain associated with enforced separation of family members; inadequate food ratio; inadequate medical facilities and limited access to education, especially secondary education. The refugees also expressed concern about the escalation of the conflict, hence increased number of people fleeing the country and appealed to the Church to intensify advocacy aimed at bringing about lasting peace in the country. Furthermore, the refugees expressed the need to participate in the ongoing peace initiatives including the National Dialogue so that their views and concerns can be taken into account in formulating appropriate policy measures aimed at restoring peace.

Despite the challenges being faced in the resettlement camps, the South Sudanese refugees expressed profound gratitude to the Government and people of Uganda as a whole, especially the host communities, and the Church for receiving and setting aside their land for purposes of resettlement. The South Sudanese refugees also expressed appreciation to the international community for the humanitarian support being extended to them.

The Conference was also addressed by the Refugee Desk Officer in Adjumani, Office of the Prime Minister, who briefed the participants on measures being taken by the Government of Uganda and other agencies and bodies towards addressing the refugees’ crisis in the country. Issues that were highlighted include the provision of food, water and sanitation, medical and educational facilities, and psychosocial support. Other issues that were also highlighted include freedom of association and of movement for the refugees including the right to move out of the settlements to seek employment within the larger Ugandan

population, subject to the laws of the country and the Convention on the Status of Refugees and other international and regional protocols. The Refugees Desk Officer also told the Church Leaders that the South Sudanese refugees, many of whom are bitter and despondent, require increased psychosocial support so that they can recover from the trauma they are experiencing. He urged the church leaders to reach out to the refugees with the word of God in order to quicken their recovery and healing.

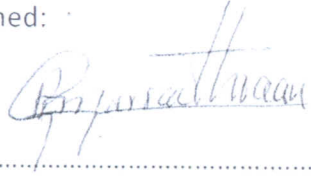
The regional church leaders were also briefed by South Sudan Council of Churches on the APP which is anchored on three pillars, namely Advocacy, Neutral Forum (People-to-People Dialogue) and Reconciliation. The Regional Church Leaders commended the SSCC for the APP which provides a framework for dialogue for sustainable peace and development.

In light of the concerns highlighted above, the Regional Church Leaders:

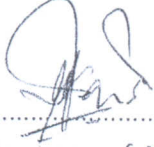
1. **Commended** the Government and people of Uganda for the gesture of goodwill extended to the refugees from the Republic of South Sudan.
2. **Commended** UJCC for hosting the conference which provided a platform for sharing of experiences on the situation in the refugees' settlements as well as exchange of views on other issues including initiatives being undertaken by SSCC and other actors with a view to finding a durable solution to the conflict.
3. **Appealed** to the international community and other actors including churches in Uganda to increase or join in the efforts of providing humanitarian support.
4. **Expressed concern** about the escalation of the conflict and called upon the warring parties to embrace peace and engage in dialogue.
5. **Noted with appreciation** the statement of intent by the Intergovernmental Organisation for Development to hold a meeting of Heads of State on 12 August, 2017 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to discuss matters pertaining to the implementation of the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan which in our view provides a viable basis for lasting peace in South Sudan.
6. **Resolved** to continue to focus on the situation in South Sudan; to continue to actively accompany South Sudan Council of Churches and to engage other actors including regional leaders and the international community on the peace process.
7. **Strongly appealed** to member churches of SSCC to focus on strengthening the unity of the churches in South Sudan as a basis for assuring a coordinated and robust engagement with the Government and people of South Sudan, regional leaders and the international community on the conflict in South Sudan and the quest for peace.

Dated this this 9th day of June, 2017, at Garuga, Wakiso District, Uganda.

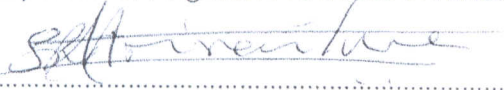
Signed:



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Chairperson South Sudan Council of Churches



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Chairperson of Anglican Provinces in Africa



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Executive Secretary Uganda Joint Christian Council