Statement of the Ecumenical Network of South Sudan (ENSS)
Europe and North America Hub

10 Year Anniversary of South Sudan: 9th of July 2021

Today, the 9th of July 2021 we, the undersigned churches, faith-based organisations and members of the Ecumenical Network of South Sudan (ENSS), mark the 10 year anniversary of South Sudan becoming the newest country in the world, following the demands of the people in their referendum.

The first sentence of the independence declaration of South Sudan recalls "*the long and heroic struggle of our people for Justice, Freedom, Equality, Dignity and Political and Economic emancipation".* The declaration "*resolved to establish a system of governance that upholds the rule of law, justice, democracy, human rights and respect for diversity".*

While people joyfully celebrated their independence 10 years ago, today we need to express our deep concern. We stand in solidarity with the people of South Sudan who for many years have borne the burden of conflicts and injustice, instead of enjoying the fruits of a new system. We urge the signatories to the agreement to implement R-ARCSS in letter and in spirit and bring an immediate end to the continuous suffering of people in various locations of the country.

We express our solidarity with the children and youth of South Sudan, who wish to live in a country of opportunities, where they can happily learn in schools instead of being drawn into armed struggles. We express our solidarity with the women of South Sudan, acknowledging and supporting their meaningful participation in governance and peacebuilding. We express our solidarity with survivors of violence and commend women and men for their strength in speaking up against sexual and other violence, in defiance of a culture of stigma and fear of retaliation. We would like to draw attention to the urgent need for peace and a transparent governance system with binding laws and implementation of those laws in South Sudan. We urge parties to the conflict in South Sudan to lay down arms, uphold the protection of civilians, to prohibit their respective forces to commit, command or condone acts of violence including sexual violence.

The implementation of the revitalized peace agreement of 2018 (R-ARCSS) started just before the outbreak of the worldwide Coronavirus pandemic. The implementation has been slow, but the agreement holding for nearly two years has now made some progress. We commend important steps like the current constitution making process to build on the principles of justice, freedom, equality, dignity, and political and economic emancipation. Citizens of South Sudan on all levels must have the chance to actively participate in the permanent constitution making process.

Nevertheless, as members of the ENSS, we express our grave concern about the continuation of violence in various areas of the country, where civilians continue to suffer, being killed, displaced, sexually abused, or starved.

We call upon the national, regional and international community to encourage the government in Juba to implement the peace agreement, to mitigate the looming crises in South Sudan. The government must be encouraged to engage the non-signatories to the R-ARCSS in a productive dialogue. In order to enable full civilian protection, the government needs to pay greater attention to transform and unify the army to include all the communities in South Sudan. Special attention must be paid to transitional

justice, accountability, compensation, and reconciliation processes to overt cycles of revenge in South Sudan. The church can play a pivotal role in this. We strongly call upon the international community, UN agencies and our own governments to urgently provide increased funding to locally driven, church and women led peace initiatives, like the home-grown and church-led Action Plan for Peace of the church and its council, the South Sudan Council of Churches, a strategy to comprehensively address the root causes and long-term effects of conflict through Advocacy, Neutral Forums, Healing and Reconciliation. This funding should be long-term and flexible to enable communities to respond to changing dynamics and to sustain any progress.

The conflict and other compounding factors have led to a dire humanitarian situation, with an estimated 8.3 million people requiring humanitarian assistance in 2021[1]. In addition, South Sudan ranks highly in terms of countries most vulnerable to the impact of COVID-19. Combined with flooding, droughts and locust caused devastation, people face one of the largest food crises in the world[2].

We urge the Government of South Sudan and other parties to ensure full, unrestricted, and unhindered humanitarian access to all regions of the country. We strongly condemn the attacks on church actors, humanitarian workers, peace workers and human rights activists. We urge and call for increased preventative, investigative and just efforts to end these devastating acts of violence.

As members of the ENSS, we reiterate our solidarity with those church leaders, peacebuilding and human rights actors who undertake invaluable peace work at a local level to mend and restore relationships, monitor potential violence, prevent and manage intercommunal conflicts while taking care of the trauma under most difficult circumstances. We express our solidarity with the millions of refugees and internally displaced people; there needs to be a lasting peace and a safe environment, so those who were forced to leave their homes can return. We urge the church and its council to keep unity and to play a positive role throughout.

We continue to stand with the people of South Sudan. We call upon all in South Sudan to respect the dignity of human life. We lift the nation of South Sudan to God and pray fervently that the people of South Sudan may live in harmony, unity, and peace.

Signatories:

Act Church of Sweden, Brot für die Welt, CAFOD & Trócaire in Partnership, Christian Aid UK, Christian Council of Norway, The Church of England- Diocese of Salisbury, The Church of Scotland, Danish Church Aid, Council of Churches in the Netherlands, Diakonie katastrophenhilfe, Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, Finn Church Aid, KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, Misereor, Mission 21, Norwegian Church Aid, PAX, Pentecostal Mission Development Cooperation Organisation (PMU), Presbyterian Church USA, Tearfund, South Sudan Council of Churches, World Council of Churches.

[1] https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/south_sudan_humanitarian_snapshot_may.pdf
[2] http://www.fao.org/3/ca8786en/CA8786EN.pdf

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Church of Sweden

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Diakonie
Katastrophenhilfe
Member of actalliance

EKD
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in Deutschland

FCA
Finn Church Aid

KAIROS

MISEREOR
IHR HILFSWERK

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