



A South Sudanese combatant with a G3 rifle

NEWS FOCUS - South Sudan

Church leaders condemn recent violence and pray for dead

South Sudan's Church leaders said they are extremely disturbed about heavy fighting in the

capital, Juba, which has raised widespread fears that the country is returning to civil war.

“We condemn all acts of violence without exception,” the South Sudan Council of Churches said, noting that it is “time to build a peaceful nation.”

“We pray for those who have been killed, and for their families, and we ask God’s forgiveness for those who have done the killing,” the leaders said in a July 10 statement read on national radio.

“However, we also urge repentance and a firm commitment from all armed individuals, forces and communities, and from their leaders, to create an atmosphere where violence is not an option,” they said.

Violent clashes between forces loyal to the president and those loyal to the vice president spread across the city on July 10, a day after South Sudan’s fifth anniversary of its independence. The outburst was a resumption of fighting two days earlier in which at least 100 people died.

“We, the leaders of the Church in South Sudan, are extremely disturbed about the fatal

shootings” in Juba, said the Church leaders’ statement.

“We make no judgment as to how or why they occurred, nor who is to blame, but we note with concern that there have been a number of incidents recently, and that tension is increasing,” the council said.

Archbishop Paulino Lukudu Loro of Juba represents the Catholic Church on the council.

For nearly a year, South Sudan has been trying to emerge from a civil war caused by political rivalry between Vice President Riek Machar and President Salva Kiir. The rivalry began in December 2013 and has left tens of thousands of people dead.

The Church leaders said that they were encouraged by a joint call for calm issued by Kiir and Machar after the July 8 violence that began outside the presidential compound in Juba where they were meeting.

“We add our voices to theirs and urge soldiers and civilians to refrain from provocative words and actions, and to do everything in their power to avoid escalating the situation,” the council said.

The Church leaders said that they are also concerned that the latest armed clashes are not confined to Juba and noted the shooting death in May of Holy Spirit Missionary Sister Veronika Terezia Rackova, director of St Bakhita Medical Center in Yei, a city about 100 miles east of Juba, and other deaths “so common that they pass almost unnoticed.”

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon condemned the “senseless violence” in a July 10 statement, noting that the fighting “has the potential of reversing the progress made so far in the peace process.”

Cathedral provides sanctuary as thousands flee Juba violence

Thousands of people in Juba have fled their homes and are seeking sanctuary in the city’s Anglican and Roman Catholic cathedrals and other places of worship as fierce gun battles rage around them.

The general secretary of the South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC), Father James Oyet Latansio, reports that many areas – including the SSCC compound – are effectively no-go areas. The area around the SSCC compound is “under



South Sudanese people seek sanctuary from the current ongoing escalation in violence

control of the SPLA Government Forces,” he said.

The SPLA is the Sudan People’s Liberation Army, and the current clashes are between the official South Sudanese army – the SPLA government forces – and opposition SPLA forces. The United Nations’ Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) has condemned the violence between the two groups and called for calm.

“We are trying to take cover from flying bullets in Juba,” Father Latansio said. “The SSCC Office Compound is a no-go area under control of the

SPLA Government Forces. They are very harsh. There are very many unknown armed men moving in the residential areas creating fear among the civil population.”

He said that many thousands of displaced people have sought sanctuary in church compounds – including Bishop Arkanjelo Wani Lemi, Presiding Bishop of the Africa Inland Church. The figure includes more than 15,000 people who have fled the regions of Nyakuron, Rock City, Mauna, Munuki and Jebel in search of shelter, food and security.

They have assembled at sites including St Joseph’s Parish Church, the Anglican All Saints Cathedral, the Roman Catholic St Theresa’s Cathedral, and the Gumba Sherikat area.

The Anglican Bishop of Rejaf, Enoch Tombe, said last night (Monday) that around 1,000 people are taking shelter in All Saints’ Cathedral.

“Please do pray for South Sudan,” Father Latansio urged, saying that the people of the country “surely do not deserve this difficult punishment.”

The Anglican Alliance is in close touch with the Episcopal Church of South Sudan & Sudan, and churchnewsireland@gmail.com

is liaising with Sudra, its relief and development arm, on the response to those in need.

“This is vicious and senseless violence, disrupting the fragile peace process,” the Revd Rachel Carnegie, co-executive director of the Anglican Alliance, said. “Yet again it is the most vulnerable who are traumatised and harmed and in their hour of need they turn to the Church.

“As a Communion we must stand alongside the Church in South Sudan. We pray for the vulnerable and pray that the ceasefire declared by both political leaders will hold.”

The UN Security Council met in an emergency secret session this week and the 15 members strongly condemned the escalating violence. After the meeting, Japan’s UN Ambassador Koro Bessho, told reporters that the Council had expressed particular shock and outrage at attacks on UN compounds and protection of civilians sites in Juba.

“The members of the Council condemned in the strongest terms all attacks and provocations against civilians and the United Nations,” Mr Bessho said. “They emphasized the need for United Nations [civilian protection] sites and United Nations personnel to remain secure.”

Two Chinese UN peace keepers and a UN staff member are among those killed in recent days. The UN Security Council is due to meet again later today to discuss the ongoing situation. The body's secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, is calling for an immediate arms embargo. "The renewed violence is outrageous," he said. "It is yet another grievous setback. It deepens the country's suffering. It makes a mockery of commitments to peace."

Archbishop of Canterbury calls for end of hostilities

The Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby has issued an impassioned appeal for the leaders in South Sudan to cease hostilities immediately and accept mediation.

Speaking last night (Monday), Archbishop Justin also appealed to all those close to the leaders to seek to persuade them to accept such urgent mediation. Those who will suffer most are the poorest, especially women and children. Those who pursue violence will face the judgement of God in answer to the cries of the souls of those whose death they have caused.

“They can still turn back,” Archbishop Justin said. “With our voices and our prayers to Jesus the Prince of Peace, let us call on them to do so,”

The Archbishop has visited South Sudan over the past two and a half years and seen for himself areas where the war had struck and the heart-breaking suffering of the people. The failure of the leaders is clear.

Cafod - Lives are being ‘shattered’ in South Sudan

Aid workers from Cafod have expressed their grave concern about the worsening situation in South Sudan, where 200 people are reported to have died in clashes since Friday.

Following his return from the capital Juba, CAFOD’s director of operations, Geoff O’Donoghue, said: “The country is at a fragile stage, as it marks its fifth year of independence; lives have been shattered by the conflict, and further compounded by the struggling economy, sending people deeper into poverty.

“When speaking with Archbishop Paulino, he told me that the Church will continue its pivotal role in building peace. And it was clear from the

many people I met that they are determined to hold onto peace, no matter how fragile.”

Heavy explosions are shaking South Sudan’s capital Juba as clashes between government and opposition forces enter their fifth day today, witnesses say, pushing the country back toward civil war.

Christian Aid partner killed

Among those who were killed in the Wau attacks was Paul Akile, the county education advisor for Christian Aid’s local partner, Hope Agency for Relief and Development. Christian Aid remains deeply concerned at the extent of suffering facing South Sudanese communities.

Jolly Kemigabo, Christian Aid’s country manager in South Sudan, said: “The five-year anniversary should be cause for hope, but there is little to celebrate when over half the population – 6.1 million people – desperately need humanitarian assistance. The cancellation of the Independence Day event highlights the degree

to which this crisis has left the economy in tatters.

“We echo the church leaders’ plea for all parties to continue working for sustainable peace, justice and unity. Although long-awaited steps towards peace are finally being taken, the crisis is far from over.

“The situation is critical. Tens of thousands have lost their lives and relentless fighting has forced 2.3 million people to flee their homes – some from the threat of sexual abuse, executions and other human rights abuses.”

She continued: “The instability has disrupted harvests, ruined livelihoods and sent food prices soaring. Right now, South Sudan faces alarming levels of hunger: 5.8 million people are struggling to find their next meal and urgently need food supplies. Meanwhile, the currency has devalued by [almost 90%](#) since December 2015, while inflation rates stood at 295% in June 2016 – the highest worldwide.

“Amid all this, Christian Aid partners continue to work tirelessly to reach displaced communities caught up in this conflict. But with no sign of an end to the violence, we desperately need more funding to respond.”

The conflict in South Sudan erupted in December 2013, after a political struggle between President Salva Kiir and former Vice President Riek Machar quickly escalated along ethnic lines, spreading across the country.

Christian Aid is running an emergency appeal for South Sudan. For more information, see [here](#).

Irish Presbyterian concern at growing violence

The Convener of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's (PCI) Council for Global Mission, Rev. Dr. Liz Hughes, has expressed her concern at the growing violence in South Sudan and its potential to lead to renewed Civil War and has asked people to pray for the country and its people.

South Sudan, which became independent from Sudan in July 2011, has struggled to achieve stable government due to ethnic and political divisions between the country's two major ethnic groups, the Dinka and Nuer.

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland has close links with the world's newest nation through the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan. Its

Moderator, Rev. Peter Gai Lual, was welcomed to Belfast for PCI's 2014 General Assembly where he appealed for prayer for the Church, the people of South Sudan and for the conflict to stop.

That same year, due to the unfolding humanitarian crisis in the country, PCI launched a Moderator's appeal for South Sudan. Presbyterians subsequently raised £340,000 (€398,864).

Council for Global Mission Convener, Rev. Dr. Liz Hughes, said, "fourteen months after Rev. Peter was in Belfast we were very thankful for the peace agreement that was reached in August 2015, but only after tens of thousands of people had been killed and over 2.2 million people displaced.

"Sadly, over the past week, the situation in South Sudan, especially in the capital Juba, has deteriorated and the country appears to be heading back to civil war, with over 300 people believed to have been killed since Friday.

"With the South Sudan Council of Churches appealing for an end to the conflict and the United Nations Security Council calling for an

end to the fighting, I would encourage people pray for the country and its people at this time.”

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