

Claretians in South Sudan



Juba, South Sudan. South Sudan, the "world's youngest country" - which attained its independence in July 2011 – lives in a bloody conflict that faces the main ethnic groups in the territory. So far the official media speak of 600 people dead, but it is feared that their number could be even higher.

As Claretians, we have collaborated since 2005 in the inter-Congregational project known as "Solidarity with the South of Sudan", promoted by the two unions of superiors generals (USG and UISG). Through December 2013, the Claretian presence in this project has been supported, among others, by Father Joseph Callistus, CMF, from the delegation of Sri Lanka (Province of Germany) who, having completed his period of service, was about to return to his Province of origin. His spirit of solidarity and the dramatic conflict has caused him to extend his stay.

The alarming news of violence during the days leading up to Christmas, motivated Fr. General to write a letter of solidarity to Father Joseph Callistus who has replied offering details of the situation.

You can read the letter of Fr. Callistus to our Superior General:

Dear Fr. Josep Abella,cmf

Superior General

Thank you for your wishes and expression of communion with us in this Sacred time. The situation has deteriorated very rapidly in some places while it has improved in Juba. We are left to wonder how quickly people turn to normalcy here in south Sudan.

Roland has gone to Kenya to be with our brothers in Mombasa during this Christmas time, as this is the only opportunity for him to be away from the Catholic Health Training Institute. I had travelled to a neighboring diocese Yei (100 miles from Juba) to say good bye to the Bishop (representative of the bishops at the Board- at least in name sake even if he has not attended any of the board meeting yet) and got stuck there two days with the SVD community.

What I saw on my way back was surely shocking. Although the media reports only 600 deaths in juba at least the double that amount of bodies were strewn on the streets and exclusive villages of people of one tribe. But in two days everything seemed normal except for the panic evacuation by the embassies and the NGOS. Juba now looks eerily deserted.

Last Sunday I went to the UN compound to celebrate the 4 Advent with the Internally displaced People. It is very hard to convince people of Emmanuel -God is with us- when they have lost their dear ones and have escaped death by inches.

Stories are horrific. We prayed and listened to each one's stories and then in a very simple way renewed our simple faith in our God who is revealed to us as one with us, most especially when we face such dangers in life. It was harder convince to let go of violence but I stood firm to say that there is no way Eucharist can be celebrated when we harbor hatred and violent retribution in our hearts. But at the end, it was a meaningful celebration for all. It was a long liturgy under the hot sun that immediately after Mass I got a chill and felt the attack of Malaria. Was down these four days and got up only today.

Thank you for your prayers and words of assurance to us. It is a great consolation and encouragement to us. People explicitly tell us 'let all the NGO's go but you missionaries please stay with us". We do not want to risk anyone's life. But we are with the people. Our community in Malakal is suffering at this very moment. Heavy fighting started yesterday and has continued till now. They (4) have taken shelter in a toilet room (the safest place in the house). We are hearing that the proposed dialogue between the President and the former vice President will take place on the 27 Dec. We pray and ask for prayers that this takes place without fail.

Christmas has renewed this hope in us even by the 22 babies born till last Sunday at the UN hospital. Amidst so much of death life finds way. Miracle of Christmas is the same, God is not giving up on us humans and we have to be in Solidarity with one another to give HOPE especially in times of human made tragedies like this.

I had planned to travel on 29 Dec to Frankfurt but will stay in Juba till 12 Jan until Br. Bill returns from Rome. He requested so that we will not leave without leadership on ground as the situation changes day by day.

Fraternally,

Joseph

Fr. Callistus, cmf