



Report



A Letter from Khartoum, Sudan

Hope amid Trauma and Distress Lasting 25 Years

Fr. Paul Hannon, M.Afr.

When I arrived for the first time in Khartoum almost 25 years ago, Sudan was a country at war with itself. Since independence in 1956, there have been only brief periods of peace. In 1983, a civil war broke out between government forces drawn mainly from the North and rebel forces in the South. This bitter war would last until 2005 when a Comprehensive Peace Agreement was finally signed by the warring factions. This led to a referendum held for the people of the South in January 2011. The vote went massively in favor of independence for South Sudan and this became a reality on July 9th of that year when Africa's newest nation was born.

As Missionaries of Africa, an essential aspect of our work is to seek all the means possible in the places where we work to foster relations of harmony and understanding between the Christians we serve and the Muslims who live around us. My first place of mission was New Halfa, far to the east near the border with Eritrea. In that more rural

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setting we had the opportunity to get to know and befriend many of our Muslim neighbors. The Christian population, the majority of who were displaced people from the South living in extreme poverty around the towns of the North.

With the coming of independence in 2011, South Sudan rejoiced as hundreds of thousands of her citizens slowly found the means to return to their homeland. Simply by watching the different tribal groups assembling their few possessions in designated sites dotted around our parish. We could see how this process of repatriation was proceeding. Our new parish (St. Stephen's) was completed just at this time and for a few months was filled with worshippers. As people moved away in convoys of trucks, we could see the numbers attending our prayer center dwindle and our schools gradually empty. Little by little, as restructuring took place we arranged the number of Masses celebrated on a Sunday and we reduced to four the number of prayer centers'. This was the state of affairs in December 2013, the time of my last visit to Sudan.

It was during that same month that a dispute broke out between soldiers in a barracks in Juba. Supporters of the Dinka President Salva Kir clashed with members of the Vice-President's supporters belonging to the Nuer tribe. What began as a relatively minor dispute developed quickly into all out fighting between these two major groups and thousands of innocent people had to flee for their lives – once more uprooted and displaced. Insecurity and terror still reign throughout much of South Sudan. Political leaders have shown a willful refusal to sit down and talk in total contempt of the efforts made by governments and agencies around the world to bring everyone to the peace table. Most recently – in fact during the time of my stay here in Khartoum – reports reached us of fighting and killing taking place in Upper Nile State where the capital, Malakal, has been all but destroyed.

Many southerners were still waiting for transport to the South when this recent intertribal fighting broke out. They are still living here in our parish in six camps which hold a total of 810 families each averaging 7 members. These camps are pitiful to see, families living in shacks made of cardboard and burlap. They manage to eke out some kind of life, while still waiting for a means of transport and a peaceful, settled place to return to in the south. The women find work cleaning the homes of the better-off that have jobs or doing their laundry and ironing. This enables some of them to rent a small one-roomed house where two or three families can find a little security since there is a walled yard around the house. Most of the camp dwellers have been here for more than two years now. How much longer will they have to wait?

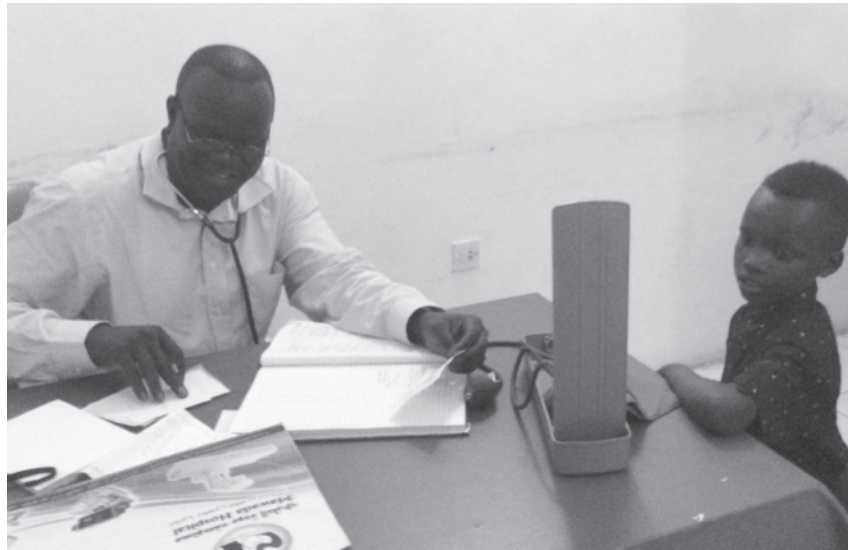
Administered by two confreres, Frs. Magloire and Joel, St. Stephen's parish has sought funding to help these people who are the poorest around us. Two very worthwhile are in place and are producing results. As there are no sanitary arrangements in these camps, people have simply to find a remote spot for their toilet needs. It goes without saying that given the number

of flies which swarm over heaps of rubbish left in the streets all types of infection are the main causes of illness. When the rains arrive – which they surely will quite soon now – one good shower can leave the whole district under many inches of water. This is inevitably the time for the spread of disease. In the poorest camp, located next to a graveyard in the Takamul district, two sets of toilets – pit latrines constructed in concrete – are being built in two places. These are raised above the surrounding land and are as hygienic as is possible here. They are nearing completion and will be a great help to the people of the camp in Takamul. Funding has also been obtained to provide each family in all of the six camps with a tarpaulin to cover their living space so as to keep off the worst of the rains.

About a mile and a half away from the missionaries' house, past noisy and chaotic *mahatta ithnayn* (station or bus stop). Dr. Wani has a primary healthcare clinic called "Fr. Walter's Clinic. Dr. Wani Ambago Wani was born in Terekeka, some 31 miles north of Juba in South Sudan in 1970. He opened Fr. Walter's clinic in al-Hajj Yousif in 2004. The clinic operates both in the morning and in the evenings from the time after the sunset prayer (around 7:30 PM) until well into the night. Some patients are still waiting to see the doctor or receive their test results at 1 AM. People here are extremely patient and long suffering and the doctors and assistants are extremely hard working. Four doctors practice at the clinic as well as a number of laboratory technicians, medical assistants and nurses.



The pharmacy employs six persons. In all, there are some 27 people employed in the running of the center. An average of 23 patients is seen in the morning and 75 in the evening. Some 650 patients are treated each week. In the photo below, Dr. Wani receives a young patient.



The fee charged to see the doctor is very modest since the people in this part of town are really quite poor. The vast majority of patients are Muslims, natives of Sudan, but there are also Christians from the south or the Nuba Mountains who pack the waiting area and spill out onto the street outside. Next door to the clinic is a well stocked pharmacy which provides medicines for all the major sicknesses and diseases.



A second doctor has an office in the compound and an eye specialist also has a room there. There is also a laboratory (see photo above) for blood, urine, and stool analysis and a facility for

for minor operations. The place is clean and well organized. It provides the residents of al-Hajj Yousif with a vital health service at a modest cost and with very good care.

At the height of our ministry to the displaced during the civil war, a prayer center was built in the district called Takamul, already mentioned. Since 2011, the parish has a meeting room where they undertake a variety of activities. It is located on a main road in a district which is far from any health facility. The sick have to take a bus or a rickshaw or a donkey cart to reach medical help. The plan is to convert this center, in the past called Takamul 2, into a small primary healthcare clinic along the lines of Dr. Wani's well established clinic. To fulfill the requirements of the Ministry of Health, the facility must have roofing providing sufficient cover from the elements, have sanitary toilet facilities and have adequate security for medicines kept in the pharmacy. There will be a doctor's office, a pharmacy, an underground water storage cistern and a toilet with a septic tank.

To speak of money and funds is always difficult, but it is through funds received by our friends and benefactors that we are able to continue providing our help to the poor. So let me make an appeal for funds on behalf of our missionaries for a medical clinic at the parish center.



Proposed Site for Clinic at Takamul 2

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