



# Report

## Giving Hope to the People of South Sudan

The hottest part of the year in Khartoum, Sudan is from March to June when temperatures can reach 117 – 122 °F. This year, the whole of this period was very hot. In my room, I have a simple ceiling fan which keeps the air moving. Each day the temperature went up to 100°F. Now, we have come to the end of the hot season. The rainy season has begun and so far we have had three heavy showers. These might last only twenty minutes or so, but the effects of wind and rain are felt for days after. The rain comes in torrential downpours which leaves the whole area underwater. Most roads have drainage ditches dug alongside so as to channel the water away. “Away” often means to the next lower lying street. People have to walk through knee deep, very dirty water for some days until it dries up.

Such was the case last Sunday when I went to celebrate Mass in a parish center, Barona, not far away from Khartoum. I abandoned the car by the road and walked the rest of the way with trousers rolled up and my Mass bag under my arm. All along the way, walls made of mud bricks had collapsed, revealing inner courtyards, liberating chickens and goats from their sheds. The attendance at Mass was poor, but the fourteen children who had been prepared to receive the Sacrament of Baptism, along with their godparents and family members, all made it – even if some were a little late. The compound was full of water and the youth made valiant efforts to channel it away under the wall. Outside, we might have been in Venice, a sea of water in every direction. And this is the state of things in “town”. Out in the country, it can be much worse.



As I write, it is Saturday evening and more rain is forecast for tonight. We wonder how we will reach the centers for Mass tomorrow.

The number of people we care for in the parish depends very much on the security situation just over the border in Upper Nile State in South Sudan. For the past two years, we have seen a great increase in the number of Shilluk people arriving in the parish. Their traditional homeland lies on the eastern side of the White Nile. The state capital is Malakal. Since December 2013, mainly Dinka government forces, loyal to the Dinka President Salva Kir, have been fighting Nuer militias loyal to the deposed Vice-President Riek Machar in these northern regions of South Sudan. The indigenous

Shilluk have suffered greatly due to the fighting and thousands have been displaced. Huge refugee camps have been established in Djebelayn just over the border in Sudan. A visiting priest from Malakal Diocese stayed with us for some days resting after a visit to his people in the camps. He told us that one priest cares for over twenty thousand refugees. Malakal has been practically destroyed by the warfare which has raged there.



Many of those who arrive in the parish have family members here and can find shelter and some food. Most have had to flee bringing nothing with them. All are traumatized in one way or another and so many widows with small children come to our parish office seeking help. The greatest demand is for medical assistance.

### **The Parish Center -Barona Sudan**

Thanks to the help given for medical care by generous donors, we can pay for the sick to meet a doctor and receive basic treatment for the common illnesses. I have noticed that we receive many people suffering from goiter – a swelling of the thyroid gland which causes a large lump to form in the throat. The most common cause is a deficiency of iodine in the diet. Sometimes an operation is needed and this is very costly.

In early May, Elizabeth Mayang, a widow from Abyei, arrived in Khartoum with her four children. She came desperately seeking treatment for the goiter from which she was suffering. We helped her with money for food and arranged for her to see a doctor. She had various thyroid function tests and was given medication and was advised to take salt with added iodine in her food. This is having an effect and the swelling is subsiding. She has no family here and knows little Arabic so life is tough. She is looking forward to return to her home, however insecure in South Sudan.

Other common illnesses at this time of year are typhoid fever and malaria. With the coming of the rains and the presence of so much standing water in the streets. Many people are susceptible to these two diseases, though it is often the young who succumb to these diseases. Some of the Shilluk refugees, like many other Southerners, are back in Khartoum after returning to the South following independence in 2011. I might mention Alfred John, an economics graduate whom I had known many years ago when he was still at school. He studied in Khartoum and is married. He has four children. He went to the newly independent South Sudan and worked with an aid agency in his hometown of Malakal. When intertribal fighting broke out in 2013 & 2014, he had to flee to Sudan with his family. He cannot find work and is helped by relatives.



**A Sudanese Home**



**Alfred John and Family**

Within St. Stephen's Parish boundaries there are eight recognized camps for the refugees. It is here that most of our poorest neighbors live. The majority of these people are from Wau in Bahr al-Ghazal State in western South Sudan. They missed out on the repatriation process which enabled most of those Southerners in our parish who so wished to return home after independence. Many people are left in makeshift camps where they are still languishing today. These are real slum quarters of the parish. Conditions are extremely poor. The rough shelters which

house these hundreds of families are made of cardboard and sacking. The more resourceful find sheets of plastic to cover their homes. Now that the rains have come, their plight is even more desperate. We have been promised tarpaulin sheets which will keep off the worst of the rain. The logistics involved in organizing the distribution of these sheets take time and needs some care.

Collaborating with the camp chiefs (the salatin, tribal elders, whose authority is recognized by the people), members of the Parish Council must make a discreet preliminary assessment of those families most in need and ensure a speedy distribution of food, clothing and medical care. News travels fast and in order to benefit from this help those from other camps sometimes arrive and claim "residence", their homes made of a few cardboard boxes quickly erected in a convenient spot!

To add to the difficulties of these people of the camps, a breakdown of law and order in South Sudan, and in the area around Wau. This violence has led to the loss of life of many of Sudanese. Waring militias and criminal gangs raid homes by night, robbing and killing the residents, or they hold up vehicles on the road. We are often asked to celebrate Mass for the deceased camp dwellers.

The Missionaries of Africa struggle each day with the people of the camps. But, we are helped in many ways by our generous donors. Those we do help are grateful. Lives are saved, changed and enhanced by the support we can give to the poorest around us.

On behalf of these poor, I send a special word of thanks to you, our supporters and benefactors in the USA, for all you have done and continue to do to aid us in this work. God bless you all!



**Children of South Sudan**

*Fr. Paul Hannon, M.Afr.  
Hajj Yousif, Khartoum Suda*

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