

Joint Statement on Sudan: Presiding Bishops Urge Prayers for Peace, International Action for Stability

A message from Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori, Episcopal Church

June 4, 2008

Over the past several weeks, we have watched with great sorrow as the new outbreak of violence in Sudan has threatened the resumption of widespread conflict in a nation just three years removed from decades of civil war. Our sense of foreboding is heightened because the violence has come in and around Abyei, a town whose history, resources, and proximity to the border between northern and southern Sudan make it a proving-ground for the success or failure of the nation's still-young peace agreement. At the present moment, untold numbers of people have been killed, much of Abyei has been burned to the ground, and as many as 120,000 people have been displaced from their homes. Urgent action from the international community is necessary to address the present suffering and safeguard against the resumption of widespread and decentralized fighting across a country already destabilized by the unchecked and catastrophic war in its western Darfur region. *In the coming days, we urge all Americans to pray for peace in the Sudan and to call for strong action from the international community to restore stability in a land whose people have been entangled far too long in violence.*

First, there is an urgent need for humanitarian assistance—both through government agencies like USAID and through private giving—in order to assist those newly displaced from their homes who now suffer without food, clean water, or shelter. (Please visit ELCA International Disaster Response or Episcopal Relief and Development linked below, to learn how you can give.) Second, increased diplomatic pressure from the international community, including neighbor states and allies of the Sudanese government, is necessary to demand that northern Sudanese military units withdraw from Abyei immediately and allow a comprehensive international assessment of the cause and effects of the conflict. Third, the United States and other parties to Sudan's 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement should insist on full and immediate implementation of the CPA and subsequent agreements, especially as they relate to Abyei. This includes provisions respecting clear borders, fair sharing of resources, and autonomous local governance in the South. These steps are necessary for the remainder of the peace process to unfold as envisioned by its drafters and to avoid the pitfalls we have seen in other areas of implementation such as the current census.

Recently, each of us has had the opportunity to hear firsthand reports of the situation from Archbishop Daniel Deng Bul, the leader of Sudan's four million Episcopalians, as well as from members of a joint Episcopal-Lutheran delegation that traveled to southern Sudan last month.

We have heard stories of great hope and courage, but also of the fragility of peace and the dire humanitarian consequences a resumption of war would bring. We hope this joint statement may raise awareness of the crisis, and urge Episcopalians and Lutherans to send a copy of it to their elected officials. In these difficult days, we pray that God, whose blessed Son "came to preach peace to those who are far off and those who are near," would grant wisdom and strength to our brothers and sisters in Sudan, as well as inspiration and purpose to all who watch from a distance and wish to help by heart, hand, or voice.

Gifts to ELCA International Disaster Response, designated for "Sudan Crisis" will be used in full - 100% - for this ongoing disaster response. Gifts may be sent through ELCA congregations, by phone at 1-800-638-3522, online at <http://www.elca.org/disaster/idrgive> or mailed to ELCA International Disaster Response, P.O. Box 71764, Chicago, IL 60694-1764.

To make a donation to Episcopal Relief and Development's "Sudan Fund," visit us online at www.er-d.org, or call 1-800-334-7626, ext. 5129. Gifts can be mailed to: Episcopal Relief and Development "Sudan Fund" P.O. Box 7058, Merrifield, VA 22116-7058.