

You Deserve To Know!

Sudan: A Nation Hungry For Peace

by the Rev. John L. McCullough

(NAPSA)—For most of the last half-century, Sudan has suffered through the world's longest-running civil war. Fueled by religious, ethnic and political differences between the country's northern and southern populations, this conflict has claimed the lives of more than two million people, mostly in the south.



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In addition, more than 4.5 million of Sudan's 30 million citizens are internally displaced, and over 500,000 have fled to other countries as refugees.

The Sudanese military routinely bombs schools, hospitals, markets and other civilian centers. Other horrors include forced abduction of women and children, the taking of slaves and systematic rape, especially in war zones. Forced conscription of child soldiers, some as young as 10 years of age, has been common by both the government and opposition forces. Christians suffer strict limits, harassment and outright persecution.

Revenues from oil have enabled Sudan's government to escalate the violence. The government has displaced southern Sudanese from oil-rich areas using strafing of villages, torture and mass execution. Meanwhile, foreign oil companies turn a blind eye to the carnage. Despite the enormous suffering and flagrant human rights abuses committed on all sides, this tragedy receives little attention in the U.S. media.

The global humanitarian agency Church World Service (CWS) is among organizations leading efforts to respond to the suffering of Sudan's people and support their creative efforts to build a just and lasting peace.

Through the Sudan Council of

Churches, which operates in northern Sudan, CWS supports efforts to improve the health and nutrition of internally displaced people. Sudan's churches have developed programs to educate women, foster new income-generating projects and promote interfaith dialogue.

CWS's partner in southern Sudan, the New Sudan Council of Churches, has initiated a grassroots approach to resolve the long-standing civil war. Their People-to-People Process brings together local chiefs, traditional leaders, women and youth to address past grievances and look to new opportunities for reconciliation. Both councils are forceful advocates for people's self-determination, equal distribution of wealth from oil revenues and peace with security.

Church World Service also has helped shelter the so-called "lost boys," more than 30,000 Sudanese boys who fled their country's civil war beginning in the late 1980s. Since 1999, more than 3,000 of these young people have been resettled in the United States.

Peace is the only solution to the suffering of the Sudanese people. Recent efforts by the U.S. Special Envoy for Peace in Sudan, Sen. John Danforth, made some important gains by brokering an agreement in principle between the government of Sudan and the Sudanese People's Liberation Army.

Whether that agreement can be realized remains uncertain. A long-term commitment by the U.S. to this effort is critical. A lasting peace in the Sudan would give the nation's children the opportunity to break out from decades of oppression—and that is what we hope to achieve. As stated in a proverb of the Sudan's Dinka people, "A child is a child of everyone."

• *John L. McCullough is executive director of Church World Service. To learn more about CWS work, call 1-888-CWS-CROP or visit www.churchworldservice.org.*