

**Testimony Submitted by Catholic Relief Services to the  
Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights and International Organizations  
Subcommittee of Foreign Affairs  
April 27, 2016**

Thank you Chairman Smith and Ranking Member, Bass, for holding this hearing to look more closely at the ongoing violent situation in South Sudan and the current human rights abuses being faced today. It is important to take this time to analyze how the international community can support and partner with the South Sudanese people to advocate for the peace agreement, to stop the violence, to support those in dire need, and to promote reconciliation.

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) is the international relief and development agency of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). CRS is grateful to the U.S. Congress, the administration, and the U.S. people for their steadfast support of South Sudan and the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance and Food for Peace for supporting our programming on the ground. While South Sudan has experienced setbacks, it is important to refrain from stepping back from our commitment to its people.

For more than 70 years, CRS has worked with the poor and marginalized around our world, regardless of race, religion, or nationality, to promote the inherent dignity of every human person and to support sustainable livelihoods for all. We collaborate with institutions of the Catholic Church and other local partners on the ground to best understand the environment and needs of the communities in which we work and to best implement programming that improves and stabilizes the lives of the poor and the marginalized.

Catholic Social Teaching, including the inherent dignity of the human person and solidarity with the most vulnerable among us, guides us in our work at CRS. This mission and our Catholic faith parallel and complement the human rights for which we seek and advocate.

**Context**

CRS has worked in what is now South Sudan for more than 30 years. Throughout the brutal civil war with the north, the hope of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) period, the joy of independence, and the suffering of the current situation, we have worked with our South Sudanese brothers and sisters. We have provided humanitarian relief in times of disaster and hardship, development assistance, and peacebuilding programs to support communities across the country looking for a brighter future for their children. Our deep involvement in South Sudan over the last three decades illustrates our commitment to working with the South Sudanese people, including our partners in the Catholic Church and the wider ecumenical community, to find a sustainable and long lasting solution to the crisis at hand.

It has been tragic to see the hope and joy of independence dissolve into the misery of the civil war: the unspeakable violence and human rights abuses - shocking even to those who have weathered other violent conflicts. When the peace agreement was signed in August of last year, we all had hopes for a better future. And while slow progress is under way, suffering remains.

According to the UN, the violence of the past few years combined with the impacts of El Nino on the region, have led to high levels of hunger. Nearly half of the country's population, are unsure where their next meal will come from, while the rate of severe food insecurity has now reached 12 percent, twice the level it was last year. In addition to contributing to hunger and malnutrition, violence has displaced 1.69 million people and caused over 270,000 people to flee the country.

### **CRS in South Sudan**

CRS works to show solidarity with, and care for the people of South Sudan and we do this through a creative and appropriate mixture of humanitarian relief, resilience building, development programming, and support to local and regional peace initiatives. Some of the significant benefits and achievements of aid and development can be seen through the ongoing efforts of CRS and other organizations, supported by the U.S. government.

As one of the largest implementers of food assistance in South Sudan through the U.S. Agency for International Development and Food for Peace, CRS encounters the most vulnerable populations in South Sudan on a daily basis. Since 2011, CRS has partnered with Save the Children to implement the Jonglei Food Security Program (JFSP). The JFSP started out as a development program, working with communities on three 'resilience pillars': disaster risk reduction, improved agriculture and livestock productivity, and increased access to markets and financial services. It was, and continues to be, one of the only programs providing food and livelihood support and services on the ground across a large section of an entire state.

When the conflict began in 2013, CRS worked with Food for Peace to modify the program in order to provide lifesaving humanitarian relief, to aid a rapid recovery from the shocks communities had suffered, and to continue to build resilience and improve livelihoods wherever feasible and appropriate. Because of our nuanced approach and credible staff, we are able to work with communities in both government and opposition controlled areas as they move along the continuum of recovery and growth. The program is a wonderful example of the benefits of flexible methods built on a relationship of mutual trust between donor and partner, and a strong foundation of contextual knowledge and understanding. The JFSP has supported 1.32 million people in nine of the eleven counties of Jonglei State as of the end of February 2016.

CRS has seen that while violence continues in South Sudan, there are many areas that have remained either conflict free or that stayed calm after the early days of the crisis. In both areas, local actors and the international community need to continue to provide resilience and development support, as children still need to go to school and receive immunizations and parents need to provide food for their families.

Resiliency, improved livelihoods, and development outcomes where possible, when set alongside robust peacebuilding efforts, can prevent humanitarian disasters from getting even worse. The JFSP helped people build levies around their farms to prevent flooding and to increase their crop yield. Because of increased resilient strategies, communities in Bor were able to save money in Savings and Internal Lending Communities, which helped them evacuate temporarily, and return when the violence subsided. Feeder roads built to gain access to markets to sell surplus commodities allowed some villages to flee cattle raiders. This particular development strategy to connect the village with the world also provided them security. Indeed, CRS' own rapid return to Jonglei after the crisis provided some communities with the confidence to stay rather than flee, or to come back sooner, rather than remain as internally displaced persons (IDPs) elsewhere. Some communities were able to stockpile seeds from their previous harvest before fleeing so that on returning, they were able to sell their stock in seed fairs organized by the JFSP or to plant the seeds themselves.

Jonglei, though devastated by violence, has also shown its capacity for peace and reconciliation. In Duk County, which is predominantly Dinka, we witnessed the peace outcomes of the JFSP approach when ethnic Nuer internally displaced persons from neighboring Uror and Ayod fled their homes looking for relief. As tensions rose upon their arrival, CRS worked with traditional leaders from both communities to ensure all those who were most vulnerable received aid. Perceived by each other as enemies, now living in the same community, these people are sharing resources, regularly discussing their everyday concerns, and finding new ways forward.

### **The Global Church in South Sudan**

During the long years of civil war against Sudan and continuing today, the church and faith based organizations have proven themselves many times over to be integral and necessary actors in South Sudan for addressing violence, poverty, and human rights abuses. Throughout the civil war, when things were at their toughest, it was only the church that was always on the ground, providing basic services, spiritual support, and working for peace.

In 2010, church leaders came to the United States three times to seek support for the historic referendum that gave South Sudan independence in 2011. CRS and the USCCB organized their visits to United Nations offices and national delegations to the UN. CRS and the USCCB also

arranged numerous meetings with Administration and Congressional leaders to help the Church communicate its message to the United States Government. Between 2008 and 2011, the USCCB visited Church leaders in South Sudan three times to support their efforts to ensure the CPA succeeded and to communicate to government leaders how important it was to work for peace after decades of devastating civil war. The USCCB continued its commitment to South Sudan with visits in 2013, 2014 and 2015.

One lesson we all learned is there was not enough focus on social cohesion and peacebuilding programming to promote peace and reconciliation post-independence. We find ourselves today in a position where we are playing catch up. The Church is in an established position to assist in this regard and the United States should invest both financially and diplomatically to support these efforts. The Church has launched a three pronged strategy to stop the fighting, help government and opposition leaders to build a new, inclusive national unity government and to promote reconciliation between people who have been caught up in the deadly conflict. Through CRS, the South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC), an ecumenical group of the six largest denominations in South Sudan, has recently received \$6 million from the United States Government for this effort. In addition, the Norwegian Government through Norwegian Church Aid and other faith-based partners have contributed additional funds in a wonderful show of solidarity to help the SSCC put the country back on track. Now that the SSCC has begun its work, we look forward to sharing its results with the Subcommittee in coming months.

The SSCC has conducted a number of consultation sessions with influential groups and leaders including the Jieng Council, the Nuer Council and the Equatorial Forum to rebuild ties between the Church and these communities and eventually to rebuild trust between people torn apart by two years of civil war. The SSCC has assumed responsibility for the Committee on National Healing, Peace and Reconciliation in the hopes of building on the Committee's efforts to identify and train peace mobilizers. These community-based staff will work with people to set up local reconciliation efforts that will repair the torn social fabric in their communities.

Today, although peace and trust are tentative and progress toward implementation of the agreement moving exceedingly slowly, as a global church, we still have hope. The SSCC is using their voice and their influence to speak reason and truth to those in power and to shed light on the senseless violence that South Sudanese people have lived through over these past years.

## **Recommendations**

As we look back on five years of South Sudanese independence, we see political dysfunction leading to unthinkable violence, displacement, hunger, and now fragile peace. In these conditions, the U.S. government must stay active in alleviating suffering and bringing an end to the conflict. We would like the U.S. government to continue its call for full implementation of

the August, 2015 Peace Agreement immediately, to continue to provide life-saving humanitarian relief to those who desperately need it, to support development and resilience wherever possible in order to create peace dividends and reduce the perception that only conflict is rewarded, and to support influential local and regional actors involved in peace movements such as the IGAD and the SSCC.

**Focus on humanitarian relief and development response where possible.** CRS acknowledges and appreciates the critical financial support of \$1.6 billion provided to South Sudan by the US government since the start of the current conflict. With South Sudanese facing violence, food insecurity, malnutrition, lack of access to health services and displacement from their homes, it is important we support them in any way we can. CRS, along with many other aid agencies, not only provides life-saving aid where needed, but also builds resiliency and capacity in areas less affected by the conflict. The crisis in South Sudan is a complex one to address, in that there are the worst of disasters in some areas combined with pockets of places where development is actually possible. A flexible strategy (such as that offered by the Jonglei Food Security Program) allows the right response in the right area—communities can be supported to be resilient and to recover while other communities can be supported to address emergencies during times of violence and upheaval. This flexibility is something we would recommend in other US government programs going forward

The U.S. government should also continue to fund conflict mitigation, peacebuilding, and longer term development activities. By funding these programs where feasible, the United States will prevent further openings of conflict and an increased need for more humanitarian assistance in the future.

**Support the international community to protect civilians and stop the violence.** South Sudan is experiencing a growing culture of impunity, increased violence against women, and a large number of child soldiers. The U.S. government must pressure the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) to effectively carry out its mandate to protect civilians in their Protection of Civilian sites (PoCs) and monitor the conflict. The perpetrators of violence must also be brought to account. Those responsible for promoting violence and perpetrating human rights abuses must be brought to justice.

We also recommend the U.S. government coordinate with UNMISS and other international partners to pressure both the government and opposition forces to remove all barriers in the command and control structure that prevent humanitarian actors from reaching those in need, to ensure humanitarian agencies have adequate security and unobstructed access to PoCs, and to continue to seek funding support from other donors.

**Pressure local, national, and regional actors to implement fully the August, 2015 peace deal.** The recent return of Riek Machar to Juba is welcome news, but now the hard work begins: the creation of a Transitional Government of National Unity. We appreciate positive US Government efforts to promote the full implementation of the August, 2015 peace accord and ask that these efforts continue unabated.

While CRS and the USCCB are frustrated with the slow pace of implantation of the peace accord, the best chance of success for peace is to keep supporting the process in a constructive way. The international community has imposed limited, targeted asset freezes and travel bans on military leaders on both sides of the conflict and there are now efforts to expand those sanctions. While the desire to pressure the parties to come to peace is understandable because progress is not where it should be, we believe it is too early to resort to punitive measures. These types of efforts have been used by the United States and others to stem violence in many countries, however, it will not be the solution that will lead to peace in South Sudan. Despite the lack of progress we hear of each day, there are areas of opportunity for the international community and the U.S. government to develop positive measures of support that will strengthen the hand of those in the government and the Opposition who want to build peace. The peace accord must be given a chance to work. The SSCC also believes that this kind of positive political pressure will over time lead to movement towards peace.

**Support church led responses to violence and their call for peace and reconciliation.**

The SSCC has proven their ability to advocate for peace in the past. The church community has been able to see past ethnic lines, embrace the common humanity we all share, and promote peace and reconciliation regardless of the differences they may face. As they plan and act, the U.S. government should support engagement in Track II diplomatic efforts, and walk with them in their search for sustainable and just solutions.

**Conclusion**

CRS would like to thank the Subcommittee for its leadership and laudable commitment to South Sudan. CRS will remain present in South Sudan to partner with and to serve our brothers and sisters. As a Catholic organization, we stand in solidarity with all those who are suffering and seek a solution that will promote peace and dignity for all people involved. We will not give up hope. As South Sudan struggles for peace and unity, we hope the South Sudanese people will see that one nation, one people, and one lasting peace is possible.