

South Sudan shows Catholic social teaching in action

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On July 9, a new nation, the Republic of South Sudan, will officially be born. The creation of South Sudan is the culmination of decades of civil war, a Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed in 2005, and a peaceful referendum vote by the people of southern Sudan in January of this year to secede.

Creating a new nation is rarely simple and South Sudan is no exception. Behind its birth are horrendous death tolls; mass displacements of people (including the Lost Boys of Sudan, some of whom resettled in Utah); the ongoing efforts of the Catholic Church, the United Nations, the United States government, and multiple international agencies; as well as the hopes and prayers of millions of individuals around the globe.

The most recent Sudanese civil war broke out in 1983 when the government in the northern capital of Khartoum imposed an extreme version of Islamic Shari'a law in southern Sudan. What followed was a brutal campaign against the 22 percent of the population practicing traditional African religions and the 8 percent Christian population. By February of this year, the death toll across the region reached 2 million and 4 million people were displaced.

The Church in Sudan and around the world has worked tirelessly throughout the 20 plus years of civil war to protect human rights and help Sudanese people lead lives of dignity in their home country or as refugees abroad. Within Sudan, the Church provides direct charity through its schools, health care facilities and other ministries. Consistent with Catholic social teaching, the Church also works for justice by assisting in peace negotiations within fractured communities.

In addition, priests, religious and Church ministries worked for justice by advocating for the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and through their work on the referendum vote. In keeping with Church social teaching on the right and duty of individuals to participate in their government, Church officials and lay members devoted time and effort to educate people about the vote and encouraged people to consider their options, without taking a position for or against secession.

The Church also joined with other faiths to launch a worldwide 101-day prayer campaign for peace in Sudan. And peace came. Despite fears of increased genocide, the referendum vote was unmarred and uncorrupted. More than 98 percent of the population voted for secession, which will come to fruition on July 9.

Of course, the official birth of the nation is not the end of the story. Immense challenges remain for the new nation. The Church continues to insist that decisions about unresolved issues in the Peace Agreement perpetuate human dignity and preserve human rights, among other things. The Church advocates for continued humanitarian aid necessary to protect life and dignity in the area, which will be

one of the poorest nations in Africa. Violence continues in border areas between the north and south, and the Church voices the need for long-term development assistance from prosperous nations, including the United States, to foster real and lasting peace.

The Church's work in Southern Sudan is far from over, which is why Catholics worldwide must continue to put our teachings into action in the area. If you would like more information or to help the Church's efforts in Sudan, visit [www.peaceinsudan.org](http://www.peaceinsudan.org).