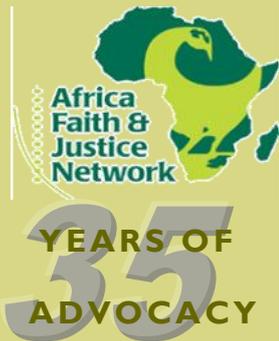


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MISSION STATEMENT

The Africa Faith and Justice Network, inspired by the Gospel and informed by Catholic Social Teaching, seeks to educate and advocate for just relations with Africa and to work in partnership with African peoples as they engage in the struggle for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.

A BRIEF HISTORY

Moved to action by their personal experiences in Africa, three Catholic missionary congregations namely the Missionaries of Africa, the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (Spiritains), and the Society of African Missions, founded the Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN) in 1983 to transform United States policy towards Africa and her people. Since that time, membership has grown and remains committed in faith to advocate in Washington, DC for U.S. relations with Africa that foster justice and peace, and to educate the public across the United States on the truth about Africa.

SOUTH SUDAN: A PEOPLE TRAMPLED

By Anna Pozzi

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Thousands of deaths, millions of refugees, an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. Six years after independence, the martyrdom of South Sudan, told by an eyewitness, Father Daniele Moschetti, Comboni Missionary.

Just over six years after the proclamation of much sought after independence, South Sudan is sinking into a political and humanitarian crisis, the worst of nightmares. Were forty years of conflict with the North's freedoms not enough to avert yet another fall into the abyss of war? The Dinka of President Salva Kiir against the Nuer of former Deputy Riek Machar, are engaging in conflict that, as always, hides interests of power and wealth at the expense of, once again, the population that has had little time to get up from the yoke of oppression and poverty, now finding themselves in a situation somewhat worse.

Since civil conflict broke out in December 2013, there have been at least 50,000 deaths (and probably many more), approximately 2 million refugees in neighbouring countries and 2 million internally displaced, thousands of women raped, a humanitarian catastrophe that has led to 4-5 million people to starvation (in a country that has about 12-13 million) and an economic and financial crisis which has emptied the State coffers. The only thing that is not lacking today in South Sudan are the weapons. But the numbers are not enough to describe the plight of one of the People most martyred in Africa. Father Daniele Moschetti, who has lived there for seven years - six of them as Provincial Superior of the Comboni Missionaries - tells us from within.

Father Daniele, what's going on in southern Sudan?

"Throughout 2013 there has been a tug of war between President Salva Kiir and his Deputy, Riek Machar, with an escalation of tension that led to the ousting of Machar from Government and the creation of a new Government with all men chosen by the President Kiir. Even within the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), there was a dramatic showdown. The tension was very strong. And after December 15, 2013, when it all began, the two groups, Dinka and Nuer, began to compete in

the barracks of the capital, the same night of the first assaults. The clashes went on for almost a week in the capital Juba, where there have been massacres aimed at the Nuer. The conflict has quieted down in Juba but extended in particular to other States like Unity, Jonglei zones where there are Nuer people and Upper Nile, a State where there are Nuer, Dinka and Shilluk."

Why?

"Certainly there is an ethnic question. Tribal divisions have remained a constant feature of South Sudanese society for many decades and in some ways have been accentuated after independence, when there was no longer an external common enemy to fight, Omar El Bashir, President of the Sudan Republic. But this does not explain everything. The struggle for power, corruption, bad management of military leadership, politics and resources and the lack of rights and freedoms complicate the conflict enormously. Conflict has become particularly bloody, especially in regions where oil wells are exploited by companies from all over the world: Malaysia, USA, France, Canada, China, etc. The rebels have tried to destroy the wells to bring the government to its knees. But it is an unequal struggle from the military point of view. The army had bought many weapons from Ukraine, Israel, China, the US and others, spending a billion dollars just in the year 2014, in a country that is starving."

In addition to oil, land and water are also part of the temptations...

"Even before the country became independent, 9% of the land had already been granted to multinationals and sovereign funds for both agriculture and raw materials. It is a real phenomenon of land grabbing on a large scale managed by what should have been the country's leadership. All generals, in particular, had as their objective the 'sharing of the cake.' They imposed a corrupt and nepotistic system. The greed of the leaders prevailed, but also of neighboring countries and those more distant. Everyone tried to get their hands on South Sudan, which after many years of war was a completely new country, open to all forms of exploitation and corruption. Salva Kiir himself had denounced on May 2012, that, between 2005 and 2011, 75 people had appropriated 4.5 billion dollars out of the 11 billion given by the donors ."

What is the situation today?

"Machar is in South Africa and is prevented from returning even if he continues to operate in South Sudan with those rebels in opposition who remained loyal to him. The international community has spent more than 30 million dollars to promote a dialogue in which no one really believed. Today the rebel groups have multiplied; at least 17,000 child soldiers have been recruited throughout these years, and many young people are forced to take up arms. The complexity of the conflict has further increased. The economic and financial situation of the country is also catastrophic; inflation is at 850/900 percent and the coffers of the state are empty."

What are the most critical scenarios?

"They continue to be those of the states of Unity, Jonglei and Upper Nile, where many oil wells have been destroyed. The government is trying to restart the production of crude oil with the help of private militias of multinationals and even the regular army. But for the population the situation continues to be tragic. The government also makes the arrival of humanitarian aid difficult because the people to receive help from these aid agencies are considered 'enemies.' In Wau, at least 12,000-13,000 people continue to find refuge in the curia compound of the Catholic Church and another 50,000-70,000 in the UN compound. In Yei and Torit there is enormous insecurity. The same is true in the region of Western Equatoria, the most fertile area, which could feed the whole country."

And from a humanitarian point of view?

"International agencies are talking about one of the worst crises in the world. Throughout the country there are between 4 and 5 million people at risk - not only in war zones where everything has been destroyed, but throughout most of the country."

One of the most dramatic situations concerns refugees and displaced persons...

"There are about 2 million refugees - a mass exodus -and the flow continues. Almost one million South Sudanese have poured into Uganda, and nearly one million have fled to Kenya, Ethiopia, Sudan, Central Africa and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. But also, there are an estimated 2 million internally displaced persons who have had to leave homes, fields, animals, many even losing their families."

There is also talk of thousands of raped women...

"The United Nations, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International published reports in July 2017 confirming the pervasiveness of the raping of women and also children by government forces and opposition forces. It is a very heavy and documented complaint. However, I fear that no measures will be taken."

What in fact does the UN do? The presence of the Mission in South Sudan (UnMiss) is controversial and often disputed...

"There has been an escalation of discredit and lack of confidence in the UN, if not hostility from the side of the Government. It must be said that on many occasions and in many contexts UN peacekeeping forces from UNMISS have done everything to avoid being available. They failed on at least four occasions when there were attacks on refugees, both Dinka and Nuer. They have changed their mandate several times. On the other hand, despite all their limitations, we must say that the United Nations is the last bastion against the total disbandment of a country on the verge of a possible genocide."

What is the role of the Catholic Church and other Christian Churches?

"The local Catholic Church has much fragility, but it still has much to say and enjoys great credibility among the people. It was a fundamental reference point in the long war with the North, and it remains so today. Good relations and good collaboration on the

ecumenical level have also developed over the past three years. As for us missionaries and religious, we are still numerous: about 500 representing 46 congregations, 30 of which are women. Sadly, a Slovak missionary, Sister Veronica Rackova, was killed last May outside the hospital where she worked as a surgeon doctor. She represents for us religious present in South Sudan the martyrdom of the Service for the people."

Have you Comboni Missionaries lost several missions?

"The city of Malakal, for example, has been attacked and taken and retaken by the government army and the rebels at least 12 or 13 times since the beginning of the conflict. In our mission of Leer, in Unity State, in February 2014 there were nine Comboni missionaries, among them nuns, fathers and scholastics. They had to flee to the forest with the people, and we did not have communication from them for three weeks. They were saved by the local people themselves, by the women in a special way putting their lives in danger. Today Leer is completely lost: the two houses, the asylum, the church, the professional school and much more have been occupied by soldiers or almost annihilated. Last January we also lost the mission of Lomin Kajo Keji, near the border with Uganda. It was one of the best organized mission, but nothing remained."

Are you disappointed in the cancellation of Pope Francis's visit?

"It would have been a very important event, especially for the people, but the security conditions were questionable. It was also a moment of great conflict between the UN and the government, and we did not want the visit to be exploited in any way. We hope it will take place in 2018. The Pope, however, has not forgotten South Sudan and recently made a personal gesture of support for three humanitarian projects related to the Church, worth \$500,000: one in health, one in education and a third in the agricultural field."

You have been very involved in the Good Shepherd Peace and Trauma Healing Center. Is the work effective?

"It's not easy, but as much as we can we try to carry forward our various activities: from spiritual retreats for religious and lay people to sessions for the healing of traumas up to courses dedicated to the themes of justice, peace and reconciliation. The Center represents a vision for the present and for the future of the country, which has not yet recovered from the wounds of the previous forty years of war with the North Sudan. Now it has to deal with the even deeper wounds of this civil conflict. It is the people with whom we work, with their extraordinary ability to resist and react to this latest crisis situation, that demonstrate to us hope in a God who never abandons in spite of everything!"

BOOK AND MEETING AT PIME IN MILAN (Italy)

Father Daniele Moschetti on October 4, 2017, launched a cycle of conferences at the PIME Center in Milan on the theme "**Artisans of new hope.**" It was a precious opportunity to talk about South Sudan and its long missionary experience, but also to present his latest book (in Italian) dedicated to this country: "**South Sudan: The long and**

painful journey towards peace, justice and dignity" (Ed. Dissensi). The book includes the precious presentation of Pope Francis and articles by the Comboni Missionaries Tesfaye Tadesse (Superior General), Alex Zanotelli, Giulio Albanese and the Bishop Emeritus of Makeni (Sierra Leon), Giorgio Biguzzi, a Xaverian missionary. The proceeds from this book will go to support solidarity projects with women and children in South Sudan.

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