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Famine in South Sudan



Maize flour meets the hunger of many

The landlocked Republic of South Sudan is the youngest nation. After much suffering in a long war with the Muslim-dominated government of Sudan in the north, it became independent in July 2011. The population, about 13 million, has 25 major ethnic groups divided into scores of subgroups and dialects. Most call themselves Christian—Catholic, Episcopal, Presbyterian, and others. About 8 percent are Muslims, and roughly 15 percent are still animists.

Independence euphoria didn't last long. The ongoing civil war began in December 2013, leading to many thousands of deaths

and the ethnic cleansing of hundreds of thousands. Tribal tensions have played a role, but the central cause is a rivalry for power and lucrative oil revenues between President Salva Kiir and Vice-President Riek Machar.

Power and Money

Income from oil exports was supposed to build infrastructure: roads, education, health care, safe water, electricity, etc. Instead, it is an instrument of war and makes fat bank accounts for top officials, especially the president's close circle of military leaders, friends, and relatives. The president and vice-president are the top leaders of the two largest tribes—Dinka and Nuer

respectively. Sadly, both men claim to be Christian. The president belongs to the Catholic Church, while the vice-president is identified as Presbyterian. What South Sudan needs is repentance on the part of those leaders who seek after power and money through war and violence.

Immense Suffering

Many towns and villages have been burned down and destroyed, especially in the oil rich area. Like its previous war, the present civil war causes a land rich in agricultural resources, deemed a bread basket, to suffer the most severe famine. About two million people are short of food, and over 600,000 of these belong to churches partner-

ing with MERF. With ethnic cleansing, many have lost fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters and/or children, in addition to their villages and homes. Families have become separated with no clue whether other family members are dead or alive.

Heartbreaking

Recently we heard from a South Sudanese brother who is involved in MERF ministries to refugees in Egypt. A message arrived from his elderly mother bearing tragic news. She had escaped from death with an 8-year old nephew on foot and by boat, and had no idea what happened to other relatives. He says:

“The world is in silent while South Sudanese are being finished. My home village was raided last week by the South Sudan government forces, they killed thousands of people and they are still pursuing those who fled into the bush killing them, burning some of them alive up to now. During the incident last week my family members got despaired and scattered inside the bush...”

Word and Deed

South Sudan is one of MERF's most active and costliest fields, and partner churches are very appreciative of MERF's wholistic approach. Ministry includes Nuer language gospel broadcasts, biblical training and support of pastors and evangelists. Many have shortwave radios and gather daily in larger groups around one radio to hear God's Word read and expounded and to learn basic Christian



doctrines. Spiritual leaders are trained in intensive Bible courses and encouraged to return to their own communities to evangelize and build up God's people. Through local church committees, some receive partial MERF financial support, augmented by local gifts of produce.

Through Local Churches

In the midst of this dire situation, MERF has carried out a small-scale but

significant diaconal ministry for several years with very limited resources. In cooperation with South Sudan evangelical/reformed church leaders, staff leader Pastor David Wat, who manages MERF's Lokichoggio, Kenya ministry centre, developed a brilliant idea. It focuses on enabling people to become self-dependent in their own surroundings under the spiritual care of local churches. Initially the ministry provided freshwater fishing tools—nets and hooks—along with blankets, plastic sheeting for waterproof shelters, and maize flour. Surplus fish can also be exchanged for other food. In addition, supplying mosquito nets has had a visible impact in reducing life-threatening malaria.

“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.”
—Galatians 6:10



Cost-Effective
MERF is a relatively small, low-budget organization focused on gospel work and obviously cannot do what big relief organizations do. Such have huge resources but tend to have large overhead costs. For the most part their efforts are commendable, though rarely combined with Word ministries. MERF's diaconal aid, working through the voluntary services of local churches, does not incur staffing or administrative costs, and is accompanied by the nourishing spiritual food of God's Word.

Please Pray
✦ True commitment to Christ and repentance on the part of leaders who pro-

fess to be Christian.
✦ A speedy end to the civil war and restoration of peace, law, and order.
✦ The work of the Gospel over the airwaves, through literature, and the labors of faithful pastors, evangelists, elders, deacons, trained in Lokichoggio.
✦ A generous response of believers and churches to feed starving brethren in South Sudan.
✦ Wisdom in the distribution of material to needy Christians and their neighbours.

Photos: Top left: Church leaders receive fishing and mosquito nets. Top right: Nuer Broadcasts reach many in South Sudan and in refugee camps in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda; Bottom: Churches in areas which have so far been spared the war receive and care for refugees.

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