

Celebrating Catholic Radio Network and its critical mission

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Catholic University of South Sudan

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*“It is your will that all our people should live in harmony, peace & unity,
because we are all brothers and sisters.”*

(Prayer for peace in South Sudan)

Peace and greetings to you all, the Catholic Radio Network staff and supporters, the faculty, staff and students of the Catholic University of South Sudan, dear Pax Christi colleagues and friends, and honoured guests, protocol observed. It is my privilege to be with you today, representing Pax Christi International as its co-president, and on behalf of Bishop Emeritus Marc Stenger, with whom I share the co-presidency, and Secretary General Greet Vanaerschot who are not here in person, to celebrate the Catholic Radio Network of South Sudan and the Nuba Mountains, as the 2021 Pax Christi International peace prize laureate.

More than 75 years ago, Pax Christi International was created to facilitate reconciliation between the people of Europe who had just endured the Second World War. Over the years, the mission of Pax Christi has expanded and grown, and now extends around the world. The Pax Christi secretariat, our member groups and affiliated organisations strive to bring the peace that Jesus Christ has promised us wherever we can, especially to areas that endure violent conflicts.

Pax Christi is now present in several African countries, promoting and organising programmes that support nonviolence and reconciliation. For instance, Pax Christi recently launched a new digital incubator programme with our member Africa Reconciled, which is based in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This programme will help young people learn how to use digital technologies, including social media and app development, to promote active nonviolence and peacebuilding.

In the Great Lakes region and in East Africa, our regional coordinator Dieudonne Serukabuza has provided many training sessions on active nonviolence to youth and to religious sisters, and has worked with our member groups in establishing entrepreneurial programmes for youth to provide a hopeful, sustainable, nonviolent option for their futures. It is our hope to extend the same to the Horn of Africa.

The Catholic Nonviolence Initiative of Pax Christi International aspires to integrate nonviolence more fully into the life and ministry of the Catholic Church and believes that it is critically important to hear from those who are pursuing nonviolence in areas of violent conflicts. This Initiative has included peace practitioners from Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, South Sudan – including this university’s Rev. Mathew Pagan and Bishop Paride Taban – and South Africa in its conferences and roundtables.

The work for nonviolence and reconciliation is deeply dependent on good communication. Thus, sisters and brothers, neighbours, friends, fellow citizens are invited to speak to and hear each other in order to know each other fully, in a way that eliminates violence. This need to connect with others is part of the human condition. More importantly, we have been sharing information with each other since the first days of human existence, with paintings on caves, smoke signals, vocalisations, and written symbols. In the tradition Africa context, children grow up listening to the wisdom passed on by elders, both male and female, through stories, myths, legends, songs and dances. Through this communication, the just peace ethics values such as love, care, compassion, honesty, community living, sharing, forgiveness and reconciliation were taught from one generation to next. This is what your radio station is striving to do – to ‘encourage local cultural expression through song and story’. Speaking to and hearing each other is an integral part of our lives. This needs to be done with dignity and clarity which is core in order to maintain peace and harmony. Equally, we appreciate the fact that your radio network continues to reflect the diversity experienced among the people of this nation. You do this by not only producing culturally sensitive programs in local languages but also actively engaging in peace journalism.

Almost 200 years ago, human communication made a giant leap forward with the telegraph, and by the start of the 20th century, inventors such as Guglielmo Marconi and Reginald Fessenden had determined how to harness radio waves into an amazing device – the radio -- that would deepen connection between humans. Today, many of us carry phones on our persons. We use computers and watch televisions. However, the ‘humble’ radio continues to be a critical tool and the most used communication tool on this continent. Thus the importance of radio as a means of communication cannot be underestimated. It has the broadest footprint of all the communication devices as it reaches many people who do not have access to the internet. Equally, it has the power to educate and spread information every day, which is vital during emergencies and crises such as the current Covid 19 pandemic. Most important, the radio does not run out of data. It is free to receive and touches everyone, irrespective of their socio-economic status, gender, religion, ethnic affiliation, and age. Another advantage of radio is that it easily accessible and portable that people can listen to it, for instance, as they cultivate their land. More so, listeners can feel that they are part of a larger community even though they have not encountered them physically. In Africa it is the communication tool of choice especially in the

rural and informal settlements settings due to levels of poverty and lack of adequate infrastructure such as electricity.

The Catholic Radio Network of South Sudan and the Nuba Mountains has harnessed these many benefits of radio to make an essential tool for the people of this great country. In fact, through the generosity and creativity of the family of Comboni missionaries, CRN was created 10 years ago in order to facilitate the peace process. Pax Christi commends the vision of CRN – a vision of a reconciled society, built on human and spiritual values, rooted in justice and honesty. We are encouraged by the mission of CRN – a mission to inspire the people of South Sudan with a means of communication that builds peace through reconciliation and healing of trauma. In addition, Pax Christi applauds the work of CRN for contributing to the spiritual welfare of the people of this region through good information and civic education. This information and education foster integral human development and respect for human rights for not only the people of South Sudan but also globally. Additionally, Pax Christi appreciates that CRN gives particular attention to those who are most vulnerable: women, children, youth, and those who cannot read or write.

The work of CRN is often challenging and at times can be dangerous – too often, telling the truth is an act of great risk. But it is imperative, and Pax Christi International applauds the staff of the network and its radio stations throughout the region for your courage, your dedication, and your professionalism. We work together to build peace and advance nonviolence, and your partnership in this vital effort is a blessing, not only to us but the global world.

Allow me to conclude my speech by blessing our peace laureate in a very special way, and you all gathered here today with the very words of Pope Francis at the conclusion of his address to the leaders of this great nation, South Sudan, that God may

... touch with the power of the Spirit the depths of every human heart, so that enemies will be open to dialogue, adversaries will join hands and peoples will meet in harmony... that there will be whole-hearted search for peace to resolve disputes ... and that love will conquer hatred and revenge be disarmed by forgiveness.

Go proclaim the good news of peace to the whole world! Thank you!