

Amid violence, South Sudan Catholics outline steps to peace



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(CNA/EWTN News).- Voicing “anguish and dismay” at the deteriorating situation in South Sudan, a Catholic bishop shared his diocese’s ten proposals to help stabilize the country after the outbreak of violence in mid-December.

“As we know from experience in our history, only dialogue can take the peace process forward,” the people of the Diocese of Tombura-Yambio said in a Jan. 8 statement shared by Bishop Barani Eduardo Hiiboro Kussala.

“Posterity will be the judge of our courage and patriotism not from the revenge we wreak but from the peace we win in these troubling times and from the progress resulting from such peace. A prosperous and well-connected South Sudan is our brave response to these divisive factions,” the statement continued.

The diocese is in the state of Western Equatoria in the southwest of South Sudan. Its statement was written after three days of consultation between priests, vowed religious and lay faithful as they reflected and prayed about the situation in their country, Bishop Kussala said.

Armed conflict broke out in the national capital of Juba in mid-December following a power struggle between President Salva Kiir and former vice president Riek Machar.

The president accused Machar of trying to overthrow the government of South Sudan.

Machar has denied the claim and accused the president of trying to eliminate political opponents, the Associated Press reports. The United States' leading diplomat in Africa, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, has said there is no evidence of a coup attempt.

The violence has spread to other parts of the country. At least 1,000 people have been killed. Reports indicate that some killings were targeted based on ethnicity.

Another 180,000 people have been displaced from their homes and lack shelter and other basic necessities.

The statement from the Catholics of Tombura-Yambio encourages prayers and fasting for peace, in solidarity with those who lack humanitarian aid. Catholics will hold prayers for peace and justice during morning Mass, Eucharistic Holy Hour and rosary recitations.

“Where and when peace is threatened anywhere in our family or nation, prayer for peace must be our response as Catholics,” the statement said.

The statement acknowledged the worsening humanitarian situation in South Sudan, urging the Catholic faithful to support their fasting through bringing food to Mass for food banks.

Regions that are enjoying relative peace should pray and undertake actions to work for solutions to the conflict, not “add to the fire.”

The statement urged President Kirri to show “an overwhelming readiness of forgiveness and pardon.”

“Please choose peace and your citizens will survive!” it said.

Catholics also urged Riek Machar to show “forgiveness and pardon” and to “take courage to renounce violence.”

It urged soldiers to show their “conscience and true character” by valuing life. Politicians, the media and other public figures should “show restraint” and not take actions that could undermine peace and stability, including “ethnic politics” and a “war of words.”

The statement thanked the international community for its support and advised “sensitivity to our complex problems.” It asked the international community to “be more sensitive to this tragic situation” and help avoid “a war that sows destruction and death.” It also voiced support for the peace talks underway in Ethiopia, calling this a “noble initiative.”

South Sudan became independent from Sudan in 2011.

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