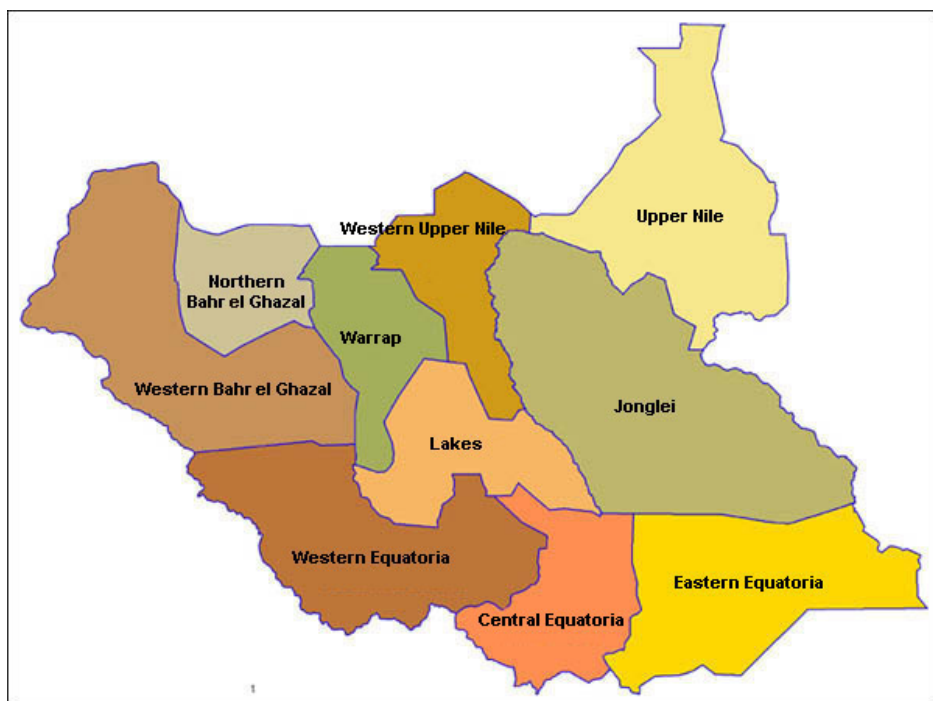


Against All Odds: Sudan's Peaceful Vote



Every single indication—a violent past, entrenched illiteracy, food and health crises, and scores of incendiary tribal conflicts—every single indication convinced every single long- and short-term observer that in the very best case, southern Sudan's historic referendum would be tainted by violence. It could not, logically, be otherwise.

Except it was.

Why?

1. The Church in Sudan. It never gave up. It never gave up hope, never gave up praying, never gave up on its people. The Church in the United States and all over the world never stopped listening and lending a hand, never stopped praying, never stopped giving, never gave up on the Sudanese people.

2. 101 Days of Prayer for Peace in Sudan. The inspired idea of Sister Cathy Arata was picked up by a group of like-minded organizations that drew others across the globe to persevere in prayer from the International Day of Peace on September 21 to the World Day of Peace on January 1. Every day a prayer. Every day a reminder. Every day believers interceded for Sudan.

3. Peacebuilding. A term many still find difficult to define, but for peacebuilders a very tangible way of reaching people where they live, meeting their deepest needs, quelling fears, and removing obstacles to peace.

4. Advocacy. Average citizens, students, concerned people of faith wrote or called or met with political leaders and persuaded them that Sudan needed the powerful voice it had in a concerned U.S. government.

5. Material aid. Despite the threat of violence, the Church and her partners never stopped striving to fill the material needs—wells, classrooms, sanitation systems, jobs, farming supplies and the like.

The reward for those efforts was, by any humble reckoning, nothing shy of a miracle.

Against all odds, southern Sudan's fragile government called on its people—scattered and benumbed by generations of war—to cast a credible vote on an historic measure in the span of a week. Against every rational forecast, they did so not only without physical violence, but without grumbling.

The next assessment you'll hear about southern Sudan is that now the really hard work begins.

True enough. But if you were involved in any way, whether praying for Sudan, informing yourself about the issues, advocating for Sudan with your elected officials, church, youth group or friends, or giving to the Church's peacebuilding work, you had a hand in a miracle.

It has begun, not ended. And yes, Sudan needs our support not one whit less than before. But knowing her people and having witnessed their momentous beginning, we are not about to leave them on their own. We cannot stop loving Sudan

Kenneth F. Hackett