

1. WCC calls for a “Mandela moment” in South Sudan

World Council of Churches

17 December 2013

The newly elected moderator of the World Council of Churches (WCC) Central Committee has called on the government of South Sudan to have a “Mandela moment” as it confronts the aftermath of an attempted coup on Monday.

Speaking from Geneva where she was at the WCC headquarters for weekend meetings and to attend a Monday morning Mandela memorial, Dr Agnes Abuom, a Kenyan, said “this is really a Mandela moment” for South Sudan.

“Just when we have laid Mandela to rest and we are celebrating his life of forgiveness and reconciliation, of justice, of freedom, of the capacity to be content and to be inclusive: this is really a lesson for South Sudan”, she said.

WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit has sent a letter to South Sudanese president Salva Kiir Mayardit, expressing profound concern for the people of the nation. He wrote in part, “The people of South Sudan have suffered for several decades and are now longing for peace and justice. We pray that the situation will quickly normalize and that peace will prevail again soon.”

According to news reports, South Sudan’s President Salva Kiir announced Monday that an attempted coup by soldiers loyal to his former deputy, Riek Machar, had been quashed. Machar and others involved have apparently fled to the UN Mission in the capital Juba.

The struggle is seen to reflect emerging concerns and differences between ethnic groups in Sudan.

Abuom stressed concern for the churches in South Sudan which through the Sudan Council of Churches and the WCC were deeply involved in reaching a peace agreement between Sudan and South Sudan, and in helping to facilitate the formation of South Sudan as the youngest nation in the world.

She said the churches there have already responded and called for calm. She added that South Sudan, as a young nation, “needs a lot of latitude for different voices given its multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious composition.”

“It is unfortunate that there has been an attempted coup, and we would want to say to those people that there is no space again in Africa for armed rebellion,” she said. “We believe in dialogue, in the power of the vote and election to change leadership peacefully and to transit from one leadership to another.”

Echoing Abuom's comments, WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit also called on the government of South Sudan to reach out to all within the country in a way that reflects the highest ideals of Mandela.

“Mandela has helped us see the worst and best in humanity,” Tveit said, restating his comments from the Mandela memorial held at the Ecumenical Centre Monday, 16 December. “He helped us to be realistic; even more important, he helped us believe in the one humanity and to love that one humanity.”

Tveit met with Kiir in April 2013, when Kiir said “After the independence of South Sudan, it is the churches that have the capability to bring people together and help rebuild the country.”

“South Sudan is a state where all religious communities, including Christians, can work freely, and their contributions for the social betterment, regardless of their religious associations, are welcomed,” Kiir told Tveit.

“South Sudan needs now, and it is called, to develop a culture of democracy that supports different opinions even when they are not congruent with what the leadership expects, because that is a democracy,” Abuom said.

2. Letter to President Salva Kiir Mayardit, Republic of South Sudan

16 December 2013

Your Excellency,

On behalf of the World Council of Churches, I am writing to you to express our deep concern regarding the sudden eruption of violence in South Sudan this past night. It is with great shock that we heard the news of the attempted coup d'état in Juba that plunged innocent citizens in terror and fear of new conflicts.

We condemn and deplore such acts of violence, particularly for a young nation like South Sudan which is finally free from conflicts after many decades of hostilities and violence. This is by no means the time to reinitiate conflicts again. South Sudan should pursue peace and justice by all means and in all times, in collaboration with all parties concerned, and become a model for other nations in Africa and elsewhere.

We ask all parties to respect this advent season of Christmas which is important for South Sudanese, and urge you to give a chance for dialogue and restraint, forgiveness, as well as for peaceful political solutions to end this conflict, even in such difficult times when tensions are exacerbated.

The World Council of Churches also encourages churches to continue being a sanctuary and an accompanying presence for all those who are fleeing away from the violence, and are looking for safe shelters. We pray with you as you provide care to those innocent civilians wounded during the violence, including children.

This is a time to pursue peace. Inspired by the late Nelson Mandela, whom we both honored when we met in Johannesburg last week we know that it is possible to live together in a multi-cultural society. The people of South Sudan have suffered for several decades, and are now longing for peace and justice. We pray that the situation will quickly normalize and that peace will prevail again soon. As Your Excellency said when we met in Juba in April 2013; “after the independence of South Sudan, it is the churches that have the capability to bring people together and help rebuild the country.”

The ecumenical community is committed to continue accompanying the people of South Sudan in their struggle for justice and peace.

Yours in Christ's love,

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit WCC general secretary

