

Report

THE ROLE OF THE SUDANESE YOUTH IN THE POST CONFLICT SITUATIONS

**PRESENTED BY YOUTH REPRESENTATIVES OF THE SUDANESE CHURCHES -
ECUMENICAL SOLIDARITY VISIT TO SUDAN**

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1. INTRODUCTION

Youth are often referred to and seen as the future leaders. However we the youth strongly believe that we have a crucial role to play in the Sudan in terms of conflict resolution, peace building and sustainable development now. Previous approaches have treated Sudanese youths as passive objects rather than participants in shaping the society. The Sudanese youth have worked hard often through selfless sacrifice to end unjust social orders and restructure social and political fundamentals.

Hence, there is a need to refocus youth energy, creativity and innovations in conceptual, operational and practical frameworks geared toward conflict prevention, development, micro - enterprises, sport, and media campaigns and in a holistic way.

This can be done effectively by ensuring that the youth are both architects and actors in promoting a culture of peace and tolerance. A vibrant youth peace movement would be a powerful countervailing force to conflict in the Sudan. The youth are organizing themselves to take up the challenge of peace building and development in the country.

2. Challenges facing Sudanese Youth.

The twenty-one years of civil war have left behind numerous damages and challenges particularly to the youth.

Some of these challenges are:

- **Culture of war.** The Sudanese youth especially in the south, were born in the war and became militarily oriented. The element has rooted to a culture of hatred, hostility and aggressiveness. It is a challenge because the young people would take time and dedicate their energy to eradicate this culture, meanwhile we deplore the fact that in some areas, youth are mobilized to fight in the militias.
- **High levels of illiteracy, poverty and inadequate skills:** Since the civil war broke out in the Sudan, the young people were the manpower from both sides. This gives them no chance at all to education. Moreover the South Sudan was the battlefield leaving no room or infrastructure in place for social life. So far generations have passed uneducated.
- **Early marriages.** Because young people found themselves in an unexpected situation, some of them go for early marriages and also giving the fact that some of them are idle they think marriage would be the only solution. Again some youth get married to fulfill the gap left by deceased relatives. (i.e. orphans who have no relative to rely on) In some cases, the marriage is arranged by the parent from both parties without real consent from the couple. The consequences are likely breakup of the marriage. Some cultural practices such as high dowry for marriage is a big challenge.
- **Lack of job opportunities:-** Due to lack of skills, young people find it difficult to get jobs. This leads to many young people to get involved in criminal activities. Lack of job opportunities for youth increases their idleness. There are jobs opportunities in our country but they are given to foreigners while the church and the government remain silent.

- ❑ **Vulnerability to HIV and AIDS.**- As a result of war, some areas in the South have become very remote and lack equipment, medical facilities and awareness needed for testing and treatment. HIV/AIDS campaign materials and facilities are not available in many areas. These factors make HIV/AIDS to spread rapidly.
- ❑ **Lack of vocational training centers.** There are few established institutions in the South Sudan where the young people could gain practical skills such as carpentry, masonry and computer training. This situation leads to frustration of the youth.
- ❑ **Tribalism.** Young people lack exposure and interaction with young people from other communities. This leads to breakdown of communication and lack of understanding between cultures. The church is not immune to these ethnic divisions.
- ❑ **Lack of recreational centers and sport clubs.** The South lacks recreational centers where the young people could demonstrate their talents and realize their full potential.

The biggest challenge to this is lack of adequate facilities and expertise to train the interested youth.

For instance majority of the youth are being hijacked by politicians who want to achieve their goals through wars and bloody conflicts. Hence, jobless youth are being targeted to join the militia in areas such as: Abiye, Equatorial, Bal el Gazal and Darfur

This makes youth victims and perpetrators of violence when they should be mobilized for economic, social and church development.

2. The way forward

Youth participation in the nation building would be enhanced through the following activities:

- ❑ **Establishment of vocational training centers.** These educational centers could help to promote awareness and build capacities of the young people around issues related to HIV/AIDS, conflict transformation, human rights and democracy. Public and private sectors should provide more chances for skilled youth. The church can use these centers to harness the talents of youth. Therefore, one would dedicate most of his/her energy and time on practicing the discovered talent for peace and sustainable development. **short and long term courses** would help the youth to generate technical and educational skills. Hence, one would earn himself/herself a living.
- ❑ Promote gospel music training ministries would encourage the young people to have faith in themselves and translate their own culture into a spiritual oriented way of life.
- ❑ **Recreational centres.**- Sports activities such as football, basketball, athletics and many other disciplines would encourage free interaction between the young people. It would easily discourage many youth from getting involved in criminal activities and drug abuse.
- ❖ **Promote Ecumenical dialogue.** Youth need more support from the church because some church leaders do not give guidance to their youth ministries. Dialogue among Church

leaders and youth and among youth themselves would encourage healing and reconciliation process and uphold the values of peace, respect, tolerance and trust.

- ❖ **Youth Participation in lobbying and advocacy for Human Rights.** During the war, human right abuse was a practice. It has led to a culture where one does not respect other people's way of life. It is for this reason that the young people must dedicate themselves and their time to eradicate this culture. By so doing, it will be easy for one to understand and respect the rights of others.
- ❖ **Set up strategies for HIV/AIDS prevention.** All the youth should be fully involved in the fight against HIV, through educational conferences, seminars, workshops, and street theatres. **These methodologies should help to raise awareness and build skills.**
- ❖ **Creation of job opportunities for youth.** - This should be a priority for the church and the government. We urge the government to include job creation plans addressing gender needs in the national development framework.

3. The role of the church

- The church should help the youth to understand the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, so that youth can contribute meaningfully to its implementation.
- In the post conflict reconstruction of the Sudan, the church should not lose focus on its prophetic mandate, especially in fostering healing and reconciliation process that youth desperately need.
- The church should advocate for the rights of people living with the virus of AIDS, care and support them spiritually and materially. The church should emphasize messages of AIDS during their sermons and church functions.

4. Conclusion

We the youth of the Sudan are committed to work for reconciliation, progress and unity in commitment that will change the country for better. We believe that we are going to play a big role in stopping the senseless killing of innocent people, rape, ethnic violence and prevalent outrageous human rights abuse that are going on in some parts of the country.

These tasks cannot be accomplished by Sudanese youth alone. We urge the Sudanese churches, the World Council of Churches, the All Africa Conference of Churches and Sudan Council of Churches to give youths a hand and spiritual support so that we can achieve the objective of a peaceful and just Sudan, where youths can feel motivated and encouraged to realize their full potential.

Thank you