

# **Sudanese bishops urge rejection of violence as Southern Sudan emerges**

JUBA, Southern Sudan – Sudan's Catholic bishops called upon the people of Sudan and the emerging nation of South Sudan "to embrace a culture of peace and to reject violence" and to respect human life and dignity as both regions prepare for the formal Declaration of Independence of the South July 9.

Meeting in Juba, the capital of Southern Sudan, the Sudan Catholic Bishops' Conference said April 7 that the work of creating what in reality is two new countries will require patience, understanding and restraint on the part of all citizens, political parties and armed forces.

"We call upon them to turn away from division, incitement, hate speech, rumors and accusations and to resolve disputes through dialogue in a spirit of unity," the bishops said in a statement following the close of a weeklong meeting. "We are all children of God, regardless of geographical boundaries, ethnicity, religion, culture, or political affiliation, and we insist on respect for diversity."

Violence has been reported in key regions of Southern Sudan, where more than 98 percent of voters approved independence from Sudan in a January referendum. Intensive clashes have been reported between rebel factions and the army of Southern Sudan since the vote was announced.

Hundreds of people are believed to have been killed and injured in violent outbreaks in Bar el Ghazal, Unity and Upper Nile regions, according to the German Catholic agency Aid to the Church in Need.

The bishops also addressed government officials in both countries who are preparing for the final stages of Southern Sudan's independence, calling upon authorities to "act justly and foster openness and participation in spirit and action."

"Citizens must recognize that great changes are not completed overnight; there is a

process which may not always meet immediate expectations. Legitimate authority must be respected, but leaders must work selflessly for the common good and avoid exaggerated political ambition. Leadership is a service to the people, and offices must be surrendered willingly at the end of the requisite term," the bishops said.

Auxiliary Bishop Daniel Adwok Kur of Khartoum, Sudan, told the German agency during a visit before the bishops' meeting that although the conflicts were intense, they did not threaten the path to independence for the South.

He also urged officials in Southern Sudan to resolve the underlying problems causing the violence, some of which may be linked to the arming of rebels by the Islamic North.

"It would be best to sit down and discuss the issues," he said to the agency. "We have to ask the people, 'What is the root of the tension?' If we do not address that, after some months or years it will cause the disturbance to widen."