



Monday 29th August 2022

South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC) Statement on the
International Day of the Disappeared.

“I am like an owl in the desert, like a little owl in a far off wilderness. I lie awake, lonely as a solitary bird on the roof.” (Psalm 102: 6 -7).

Every year, worldwide, the *International Day of the Disappeared* is marked on 30 August. It is an occasion to raise awareness of the issue of disappearances, to remember missing people and express solidarity with their families.

Behind every missing person, there are countless more people suffering from the anguish and uncertainty of not knowing the fate and whereabouts of their loved ones. Along with the terrible pain that only grows as years go by without answers, they often face numerous psycho-social, administrative, legal, and economic difficulties. The Red Cross in South Sudan has reported more than 5500 cases of missing persons. However, this figure is far from representing reality, as most cases of disappearances are not registered and documented.

Between 2020 and 2021, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the SSRC assessed the needs of families of missing persons in South Sudan through 181 interviews and focus group discussions. The need to know what happened to their loved ones was the main priority highlighted by families, followed by mental health struggles and economic problems.

Families of missing persons shared that their religious beliefs are the most helpful way of coping with their pain. Most commonly, families go to their church or call its members to their homes to pray and experience solidarity and support. They reported receiving emotional relief and maintaining a sense of hope through these interactions. Almost all families considered these rituals and practices helpful. More than two-thirds of families shared that collective prayers would be the most helpful type of event.

On the *International Day of the Disappeared*, the South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC) calls, appeals and requests all Churches and faith communities across South Sudan to include some of the following messages during religious services held on August 28, or issue a statement in support of families of missing persons.

South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC) recognizes that:

1. In South Sudan, disappearances affect individuals, families, communities, and society. Decades of armed conflict, violence, arbitrary deprivation of liberty, lack of dignified management of the dead, seasonal natural disasters, and



migration lead to persons becoming missing. The exact scope of the issue of disappearances remains unknown, yet painfully large.

2. The never-ending uncertainty, expectancy, and pain of families of missing persons pervade every aspect of their lives. Not knowing what happened to their loved ones and being unable to give them a dignified burial remains an open wound, leaving little possibility for families and communities to recover and move on.
3. Religious faiths are guides for families to cope with their suffering related to the disappearance of their loved ones. Religion plays an integral role in supporting families of missing persons to cope with suffering and despair.

Therefore, the South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC) urges:

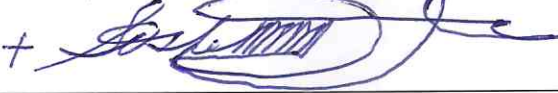
1. The Government to help clarify the fate of missing persons through possible means. Until the families have an answer, they wait for their loved ones, and their suffering will go on. Time does not heal; answers do.
2. The Government to recognize the plight of families of missing persons in South Sudan and provide them with care and assistance, legal and economic support, health and educational services, and sustainable and dignified livelihood opportunities. To this end, comprehensive legislation for missing persons and their families must be adopted.
3. The Government and all communities to make all efforts to prevent anyone from going missing. Peace and security contribute to preventing disappearances and finding answers to the fate of missing persons.
4. All churches and God-fearing people to stand in solidarity with and address families of missing persons and their suffering in their masses and prayers, as many families of missing persons find relief in their religion.
5. All Churches and Church Leaders to raise awareness of the rights and needs of families of missing persons and former missing persons and prevent any stigmatization they face.
6. Church leaders to care for the children of missing persons, to assist them with social inclusion, access to education, and relief for their suffering. Children shall not be left alone to cope with the pain of their missing parents.
7. The communities, societies, and institutions of South Sudan must acknowledge the suffering of families of missing persons and stand by them. Families of missing persons must know that they are not alone, and their loved ones are not forgotten. Families should not be stigmatized.
8. Church leaders to establish an association for families of the disappeared to
9. All stakeholders, such as the youth, civil society organizations, humanitarian organizations including the Red Cross, and community leaders to assist families of missing persons with their economic, legal, and administrative problems, mental health-related needs, their plight for recognition, and create awareness of their suffering.

O God Bless South Sudan!

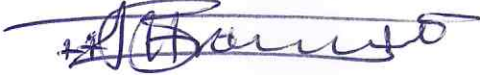
SIGNED :



Rt. Rev. Moderator James PAR TAP HON
Chairman, South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC), JUBA.



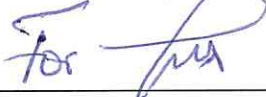
The Most Rev. Dr. Stephen AMEYU MARTIN MULLA
Metropolitan Archbishop of JUBA &
Apostolic Administrator, Catholic Diocese of TORIT.



The Most Rev. Dr. Justin BADI ARAMA
Archbishop and Primate
Province of the Episcopal Church of South Sudan (ECSS) &
Metropolitan Archbishop of JUBA Diocese, JUBA.



Bishop James LAGOS ALEXANDER
Presiding Bishop, Africa Island Church (AIC), JUBA.



Bishop James LADO
General Overseer, Sudan Pentecostal Church (SPC), JUBA.



Rt. Rev. James MAKUEI CHUOL
Moderator of the General Assembly
Presbyterian Church of South Sudan (PCSS), JUBA.



Fr. James OYET LATANSIO PhD
General Secretary
South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC), JUBA.

