



8th December 2023

SSCC CHRISTMAS MESSAGE OF HOPE 2023

The angel said to the shepherds, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people ... And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." (Luke 2:8-14).

Brothers and Sisters,

"Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." (Luke 2:8-14).
Merry Christmas and Joyful New Year 2024!

Christmas is a time filled with many exciting things. Often there are gifts and gatherings, food, and good times. But more than anything else, Christmas is seen as a time for us to step back and take in the deep and rich meaning of this sacred event. First, we see that God entered our human condition and, in doing so, can identify with all that we experience in life. God understands human life! He lived it. Second, we come to understand that the birth of the Savior of the world and His appearance to the shepherds reveals that every one of us is invited to come and meet Him. God humbled Himself in the most profound way so that we could come to know Him.

God is given to us, today, as an infant. Small, weak, fragile, and innocent. God is given to us today in our doubts; God is given to us today in our poverty; God is given to us today in the fragile situation of the economy; God is given to us today in the fragile situation of the poor; God is given to us today in the fragile situation of our lives. Do not be afraid to gaze upon His humble presence and to give glory to God for His blessed coming. Even the poor simple shepherds who spent their days and nights tending their sheep of the fields were the first to be called by God to go and greet the newborn King. What's amazing is that God did not first call the "important" of the age to come worship. He called these poor shepherds. One thing this tells us is that, in the eyes of God, all are equal. God does not pick favorites from among those who are seen as important in the eyes of the world. No, He sees the great value and dignity of each person and desires all of us, rich or poor, powerful, or weak, to come to Him in adoration and love.

However, as we celebrate Christmas and wish each other Happy New Year 2024, South Sudan is traveling a transitional journey with Hope towards a democratic future as provided in the Revitalized Agreement (Roadmap). Since independence in July 2011, South Sudan never held elections. The polls planned for 2015 were never held due to sudden onset of violence in December 2013 that engulfed the entire country and reversed democratic gains. Before the eruption of violence, significant progress had been made in adopting the permanent constitution as stipulated in the Transitional Constitution. The Revitalized Peace Agreement, signed in September 2018, stipulates a host of reforms that should be implemented, all of which will culminate in an election. But the slow implementation of the Revitalized Peace Agreement led to several extensions. The extended pact, rather the agreement on the roadmap to a peaceful and democratic end of the transitional period, provides for elections to be held by December 2024.

The process of the implementation and the fact that the country has been in transition since independence, calls for elections to be held on time at the end of the transition. There are voices and

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calls from among the citizens and scholars for elections; some of whom contend that it may not be fair and credible; however, the upcoming elections, faces challenges since critical milestones in the Revitalized Peace Agreement remain unsettled. The good news is that the Revitalized Transitional National Legislative Assembly (R-TNLA) has passed crucial legislation, *the National Elections Amendment Act 2023*, to pave way for elections. Evidence from various experiences indicate that elections do play a critical role in building peace and grounding democratization in post-conflict settings. However, several times the conduct of elections in the post-conflict environment is often a recipe for renewed violence.

The South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC) views elections as a crucial post-conflict democratic transformation initiative. For elections to be fair and credible, the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGoNU) would surely need to overcome operational and substantive challenges befalling the *National Elections Amendment Act 2023*.

It is in this context this is the role the Church can play in the preparations for the elections. **1. Moral Guidance:** The Church serves as moral compass and will play a crucial role in providing moral guidance to both political leaders and the general population; and will promote ethical behavior and values in the electoral process. **2. Civic Education:** The Church recognizes the significance of an informed electorate and actively engages in voter or civic education campaigns; raising awareness and building consensus on elections. **3. National System for Mediation:** The Church has got a non-partisan and common voice role to play in the national system for mediation. **4. Election Monitoring:** Ensuring fairness, transparency, and accountability during and after the electoral process. **5. The Gospel of Non-violence:** The Church will engage the citizens in promoting the spirit of non-violence before, during and after the electoral process.

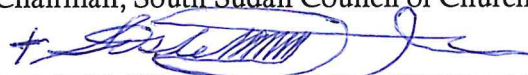
His Holiness Pope Francis during the Ecumenical Peace Pilgrimage said: *"Hope is the word I would leave with each of you, as a gift to share, a seed to bear fruit."* We as the Church remain hopeful and committed to peace and unity for the people of South Sudan. The Church urges political leaders to continue with acts of peace while bearing in mind that the development of the country resides in their decisions to maintain peace and security. Together with our political leaders, we can change the path that the country will take. We must change the narrative that has been planted in our hearts by trauma. Let us be united in love with a spirit and foundation of reconciliation guided by a light of hope of Christmas. Christmas festival is a season to have a change of heart and mind. It is a season to refrain from causing pain to one another. It is a season to choose forgiveness. Forgiveness is the journey we take toward healing and reconciliation. The Gospel of non-violence in this Christmas festival and the New Year is the new way forward.

Happy Christmas and Joyful New Year of Hope 2024.

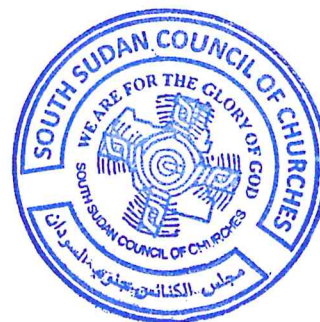
SIGNED.



Rt. Rev. Thomas TUT PUOT MUT
Moderator of the South Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church (SSPEC) &
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His Eminence Dr. Stephen AMEYU MARTIN Cardinal MULLA
Metropolitan Archbishop of JUBA, Catholic Church.

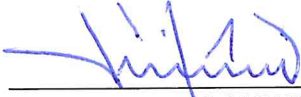




The Most Rev. Dr. Justin BADI ARAMA
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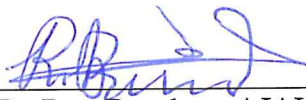
Bishop James LAGOS ALEXANDER
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