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THE FORGOTTEN WAR THE CASE OF SOUTH SUDAN



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South Sudan, the youngest of the African states, only achieved independence in 2011 after more than 20 years of war, culminating in the signing of a peace treaty with the government of Sudan. Since 2013, however, the State has not enjoyed peace, instead it has been torn by civil war and riven by daily battles for control of its territory. The Country suffers from severe and chronic internal instability in political, economic, humanitarian and military terms: civil conflicts have undermined the minimal economic and social progress that had been achieved by the State. **Despite the ceasefire agreement signed in 2018 between President Salva Kiir Mayardit and rebel leader (and former President) Riek Machar, kidnap-**

pings, violence, gang rapes and summary executions continue to worsen the humanitarian situation of millions of people. The

underlying reasons for the civil war lie mainly in tensions over the division of government power and political offices, and the difficulty for the population to access work and food. According to Adama Dieng, UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, however, it is no longer just a question of ethnic clashes, but rather of local power groups fighting for control of oil. After years of civil conflict, an estimated 4.5 million people have left their homes to seek refuge in safer

parts of the Country or in neighbouring States. **About 2 million people are internally displaced and a further 2.5 million have fled the Country to Uganda, Sudan and Ethiopia.** The risks to which the local population is exposed as a direct consequence of the armed conflict are a general increase in violence and abuse, sexual exploitation and recruitment, especially of young people, by armed militias. The unstable political situation also affects the economy; with the outbreak of the civil war, oil production decreased while the number of people living in extremely vulnerable economic conditions has increased exponentially. Between October and November 2020, about 4.1 million South Sudanese were assessed as being in Integrated Food Security Phase 3, 2 million in Phase 4 and about 92 000 in Phase 5 (where 5 is the highest level of food insecurity).

The main causes of malnutrition - in addition to persistent conflict - are inadequate public facilities, precarious economic conditions and lack of access to humanitarian aid in remote areas of the Country¹. In addition, the spread of disease and viruses has led to the loss of large quantities of livestock and compromised harvests with direct repercussions on household economies. An estimated 40 per cent less crops are being produced each year due to labour shortages caused by

*“If one of us,
any human being,
is at this moment
suffering,
is sick or hungry,
it affects us all.
It must concern us all,
because to ignore
a man’s suffering is
always an act of violence,
and one of the most
cowardly.”*

Gino Strada

Buskashì. Viaggio dentro la guerra

large-scale displacement, both internal and external, the destruction of agricultural activities and the disruption of trade flows. Not only has the armed conflict affected the agricultural economy, but it has also deprived the population of access to drinking water, exposing millions of people to increased risk of disease, particularly cholera, caused by the use of contaminated water. The **Human Rights Council**⁴ established the **Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan** on 23 March 2016 for a period of one year, subsequently extending its mandate - until its last confirmation in March 2021 - by resolution 46/23. The function of the Commission is to report facts and circumstances, collect and preserve evidence in order to clarify responsibility for serious violations and abuses of Human Rights and crimes committed in the Country, including sexual, gender-based, and ethnic violence, so as to end impunity. In 2021, the Commission documented 3,414 civilian victims directly affected by violence: men, women, children; killed, injured, abducted or subjected to conflict-related sexual violence; in

the same year, the UNMISS⁵ office reported on the use of sexual violence, in the context of localized violence, as a weapon to punish rival groups. Members of the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan conducted their ninth visit to the Country from 7 to 12 February 2022 and produced a report⁶ covering the period from January to December 2021, detailing

the main Human Rights challenges facing the Country, particularly with regard to the rights of women and girls. Violence among indigenous communities appears to be triggered by long-standing practices of cattle raiding and revenge attacks, facilitated by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

Despite the signing of a peace agreement between the conflicting communities on 27 October 2021, tensions remain high and attacks frequent. Incidents documented by the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan include killings, injuries, rape and other forms of sexual violence, abductions, forced displacement, arbitrary detention and looting. The humanitarian situation remains extremely alarming, not least in view of climate change emergencies that continue to cause mass displacement, exponentially raising the number of women and girls at risk. For example, nearly 80,000 civilians⁷ were displaced by the violence in Tambura⁸, further limiting their socio-economic rights such as the right to food, health, education and housing. Water, sanitation and hygiene conditions progressively and inevitably deteriorated.

Every day, in the world, numerous conflicts are fought: hatred and violence seem to be intrinsic to human nature, showing its worst face. The inhumanity of war no longer only involves soldiers and armies, instead it destroys the civil and social fabric of a community or a Country in its entirety, leaving imperishable and indelible marks on the common conscience and on the pages of history called upon to document its horror. The many current conflicts including the numerous forgotten wars show how heavily humanity is burdened by the weight of hatred and violence. Frequently, as in the case of South Sudan, even after the war itself has “ended”, conflicts between factions continue; and even when this does not happen, the effects often prevent the local population from rebuilding a new normality. The war continues, even after the “end” of the war itself, quieter to the ears of those who do not pay attention, sometimes subdued, sometimes louder. It exists and continues to deeply undermine the lives of the populations involved and to prevent them from fully enjoying their rights. South Sudan is just one example. Like Afghanistan. Syria. Yemen. Somalia. Libya. Nigeria. Wars that we cannot ignore: let us not forget any of them, instead let us shed light on each one. Let us not forget the civilian populations who, living in war-torn territories, suffer the horrific consequences caused by the designs of those in power and of political and economic interests. Even if we cannot actively contribute to their well-being, historical memory is our duty as human beings. ■

¹Report 2019 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)

²Source: Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (or IPC scale) set of standardised tools to classify the severity of food insecurity in different Countries.

³Sources: FAO, UNICEF, WFP

⁴United Nations body based in Geneva. A subsidiary body of the General Assembly, it works closely with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

⁵United Nations Mission in South Sudan

⁶“Technical assistance and capacity-building for South Sudan” - Report of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights - 49th Session of the Human Rights Council - 28 February to 1 April 2022

⁷Source: OCHA (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs)

⁸Population centre in South Sudan, located in the Gbudwe State.

FMSI AND CHILD RIGHTS CONNECT EXPRESS THEIR CONCERN FOR THE HUMANITARIAN SITUATION AFFECTING CHILDREN IN UKRAINE

FMSI and Child Rights Connect express their concern for the humanitarian situation affecting children in Ukraine. During the Urgent Debate on the situation of human rights in Ukraine – held on March 3rd at the **49th Session of the Human Rights Council** – Child Rights Connect and all its members called for a ceasefire and urged the international community to support all measures that protect children's rights. **FMSI is a member Organization of Child Rights Connect since 2013 and it has special consultative status with UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)** that gives the

Organization the **opportunity to participate in relevant UN conferences, meetings and working groups dealing with child rights. FMSI has presented reports on the situation of human and child rights in more than 30 Countries.**

As at 10 March 2022, according to UNICEF, more than 1 million children have fled Ukraine with their families to Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Moldova and Romania. The situation for children caught up in the conflict in Ukraine grows worse by the minute. Many children have been killed, wounded and traumatized



by the violence of the war. FMSI and Child Rights Connect are working together with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. The whole network prepared a **statement** to express concern for the humanitarian situation affecting children in Ukraine.

"As a network of organisations and individuals committed to protecting and promoting the human rights of children, we stand united against war. We reiterate the Secretary-General's call for a ceasefire and a return to dialogue and negotiations to stop the escalation of war in Ukraine and we call on the international community to support all measures that protect children's lives and wellbeing, including support for all children and families to find safety within Ukraine and across borders without discrimination. We also support the establishment of a Commission of Inquiry by the Council and any other accountability mechanisms to deal with violations and abuses of children's rights."

As mentioned in article 38 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, "[...] States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure protection and care of children who are affected by an armed conflict."

WHAT IS CHILD RIGHTS CONNECT?

Child Rights Connect is a global network of 80 international and national non-governmental organizations committed to ensuring that all children fully enjoy their rights as defined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Child Rights Connect works with independent NGOs in any Country that has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and/or its Optional Protocols. Since its establishment in 1983, the NGO Group has developed leading expertise in child

rights and the work of the Committee at the international level, providing a coordinated platform for NGOs action and playing a central role in key child rights developments. As a network, it has members at national, regional, and international levels, including other networks and child-led organisations. Child Rights Connect works closely with national NGOs and coalitions, UN agencies and experts, States, and children themselves, to advance children's rights around the world. **It has a working relationship with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and special ECOSOC consultative status at the United Nations, meaning that it is fully recognised to take part in United Nations deliberations.** Child Rights Connect – leading expert on the work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child – plays a central role in key children's rights developments at international level, including the drafting of all the UN treaties on children's rights. ■



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL NO. 1: NO POVERTY

The Solidarity Secretariat has already spoken several times about the Sustainable Development Goals. We already know that these are a group of goals that we wish to achieve by 2030, for all countries, for all people in the world. Yes, they are ambitious goals. At the same time, we already know that they are achievable, at least in a broad range. And yes, to achieve them requires our strong commitment, but also our collaboration as Marists. Reflecting on the first of these objectives, several thoughts may come to mind. First of all, we discover that there are various forms of poverty, we discover that poverty has more than one aspect. We are aware of the food poverty of millions of people who have nothing to put in their mouths; but we also often see the housing poverty of "homeless" people, whom we see sleeping on the doorsteps of our cities; or the energy poverty of those who cannot light a cooker to keep warm on winter days; or the educational poverty of those who cannot go to school.

Another idea that may come to mind is the "repetition" of this issue. Yes, there is repetition, because it is an essential issue, because it is an issue that we cannot leave for later. We discover that this objective is related to "the cry of the poor" of which the objectives of Laudato Si speak to us; we see that this objective guides the work of our NGOs and Marist solidarity associations, in many of our countries and Provinces, for many years; this objective reminds us of the tradition of the Church to work for those who have the least, to join with those in need, to not allow human dignity to be undervalued.

Official reports, over the last 25 years, tell us of

the reduction of poverty in overall numbers, although it is true that the numbers of people suffering from poverty are still scandalous. We are also aware that the pandemic situation has worsened the lives of many people who have been seriously affected. As Marists of Champagnat, since our foundation, we are committed to situations of vulnerability, we wish to be close to people in need. Our last General Chapter reminds us of this with the beautiful expression of the 4th call: "to walk with children and young people on the margins of life" and it also invites us to be attentive to the signs of the times with another expression, equally beautiful, which we find in the 5th call: "to respond boldly to emerging needs". Our Marist works are called, in this 21st century, to continue to work for the good of those most in need. We are called to work with others, in networks, so that we can go further in our goal of reducing situations of inequality. Thanks to networking we are able to discover how our partners are working in places where we Marists do not have a presence (parts of Eastern Europe, some areas of Africa, some countries in Asia...). This enriches us and encourages us to continue working, in a committed way, wherever we are. ■



THE UPR MECHANISM THEORY AND PRACTICE OF FMSI COMMITMENT

In November 2021, members of FMSI staff, together with a number of European Marist Delegates, took part in the training course "Mechanisms for the Defence of Human Rights", held by Dr Maria D'Onofrio, Secretary General of CCIG (International Catholic Center of Geneva), a non-profit organisation that works alongside NGOs in a collaboration aimed at identifying possible solutions to current political and socio-economic problems, with a specific focus on the dignity of the human being and the achievement of greater social well-being. The course, divided into five sessions, explored several themes in depth, these included:

- Analysis of international Human Rights obligations
- United Nations commitment to respect Human Rights
- United Nations mechanisms for the promotion and protection of Human Rights
- The Human Rights Council
- Theoretical introduction to the functioning of the UPR mechanism
- Presentation of the forms of participation of civil society actors
- Drafting of a report for the Universal Periodic Review (UPR)
- Rights of the Child
- Specificity of the commitment of FMSI and the Solidarity Secretariat

The UPR is a mechanism of the UN Human Rights Council that involves a review - every four and a half years - of the human rights records of all 193 UN member states. It is a country-led process and provides an opportunity for each

Country to review and report on actions taken to improve the human rights situation within its borders, while empowering other states to make recommendations to the country under review on how best to promote the implementation of human rights obligations on the ground. The process recognises a significant role for NGOs in monitoring the commitments made by Member States during the review. Therefore, the contribution of Non-Governmental Organisations and local Human Rights defenders is of paramount importance to ensure the effectiveness of this mechanism and, consequently, the positive impact on the lives of those affected.

FMSI, in partnership with CCIG, ERI (Edmund Rice International) and Dominicans for Justice and Peace submitted the Project "Human rights enhancement through the United Nations (UN) Universal Periodic Review (UPR)" which was approved and successfully implemented in Papua New Guinea. In accordance with Sustainable Development Goals numbers 4, 5, 12, 13, 15 and 16 of the United Nations 2030 Agenda and building on the success of previous initiatives carried out by the aforementioned group in the same field in other Countries, the Project - implemented during 2021 - aimed to strengthen a local network providing skills to monitor and support better implementation of Human Rights in the Country. The Project assisted local civil society actors in adopting an appropriate methodology to monitor and follow up on the most pressing Human Rights issues in Papua New Guinea through the UPR mechanism. In this way, the Project enabled local NGOs to be more effective in their advocacy activities, strengthening

collaboration with the Government of Papua New Guinea while improving the condition of individuals at risk. The Project achieved the objectives set during the drafting of the proposal thanks to the concerted action taken both within the country and at the international level. In particular, the project aimed at building and strengthening the ability of local human rights defenders to protect human rights at the national and international levels, as well as consolidating the network of defenders to better coordinate joint advocacy activities. The Project also aimed at raising the visibility of local challenges in order to improve the responsiveness of national decision-makers to Human Rights obligations in the country, and to develop more effective implementation strategies. Thematically, FMSI and the project partners were in a unique position to bring national and international attention to the most vulnerable people in Papua New Guinea equipping them to defend their rights. ■



The Project in numbers:



- 5 macroa-activities
- 25 direct beneficiaries
- 14.000 indirect beneficiaries
- 7 specific recommendations presented to the Government of Papua New Guinea on children's and women's rights



- 16 representatives of PNG Civil Society Organisations involved in order to create a national network for the protection of Human Rights



- 1 UPR report
- 1 Side Event held in Geneva

The training course in numbers:



- 5 training days
- 9 macro-areas
- 17 people involved

Obiettivi SDG



Obiettivi Laudato si'

