News



A person stands in a street in the city of Omdurman, Sudan, April 7, 2024, which is damaged from the fighting in the 16-month civil war in the country. On the day talks began in Geneva aimed at ending the conflict, a Catholic bishop in the region said Aug. 14 that the humanitarian situation in the northeast African country could not wait for "tomorrow." (OSV News/El Tayeb Siddig, Reuters)

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Khartoum, Sudan — August 19, 2024
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On the first day of talks in Geneva aimed at ending the 16-month Sudanese conflict, a Catholic bishop in the region stressed that addressing the humanitarian situation in the northeast African country cannot not wait for "tomorrow."

Bishop Stephen Nyodho Ador Majwok of Malakal, South Sudan, a diocese bordering Sudan, spoke with OSV News Aug. 14 amid a warning that the conflict that started in April 2023 had created the world's largest humanitarian crisis and triggered famine-like conditions across the country.

His diocese, already weighed down by local challenges, is also shouldering the burden of new refugees and returnees forced out by the Sudanese war.

"We welcome the peace talks. Sudanese bishops have been calling for inclusive and unconditional dialogue to end the war," Majwok told OSV News in a telephone interview. "The suffering is really terrible. Nobody can wait for tomorrow."

The war between the Sudan Armed Forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces started in Khartoum, the capital, on April 15, 2023, as a power struggle between the army leader Gen. Abdel Fattah Burhan and the paramilitary commander, Mohammed Hamdan "Hemedti" Dagalo.

According to the International Rescue Committee, the war casualty estimate is hard to count, with the organization saying the conflict may have killed between 15,000 and 150,000 people.

More than 10 million people have been displaced, with more than 25 million — half of Sudan's population — needing humanitarian assistance, according to IRC. Famine and floods are adding to the challenges of displaced people.

In July, the United States invited the fighting sides for talks in Switzerland — with the paramilitary side sending a delegation, alongside the African Union, the United Nations and Egypt, but the army said it would not participate in the talks.

"We will not retreat, we will not surrender and we will not negotiate," Burhan was quoted as telling his troops after surviving a drone attack.

But the bishop urged all to agree to talks to end the conflict, which was already out of control with the people continuing to move within and out of the country.

According to Majwok, initially, the people thought war would end quickly, but it looks like it is only intensifying month by month.

"They have arrived with nothing. It is a big problem with South Sudan's hard economic times, but the church is doing the best it can," Majwok told OSV News.

On Aug. 4, the army and the General Intelligence Service evacuated five Italian nuns, a priest and 20 South Sudanese nationals who had been trapped in Khartoum, the capital, for a year and four months, the Sudanese Armed Forces' confirmed in an Aug. 6 statement.

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The Salesian sisters, also known as Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, along with a Salesian priest and Christians sheltering with them had remained trapped in Al-Sharaja, an area under the Sudan Armed Forces control, but surrounded by paramilitary since April 2023.

The missionaries were living in Dar Maryam, an educational complex housing a kindergarten and a primary school. The religious community hosted dozens of people from the area, including Muslims and Christians, who fled the fighting. Refugees were receiving water from the center, while the army provided food, medical care and solar power when necessary.

The house had been bombed twice, with intense fighting forcing the community to stay indoors. In December 2023, the International Committee of the Red Cross attempted to rescue the community, but the attempt was abandoned after the paramilitary shot at the convoy.

"The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians express their gratitude to the Sudanese Armed Forces for the success of the evacuation," the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians said in a statement on Aug. 4.

The sisters had been in Khartoum for nearly 40 years, providing education services to boys, girls and young people in the suburb of the Sudanese capital. Evacuated Salesian sisters and a priest were the last Catholic religious community left in Khartoum.

"They are now out of Khartoum, on their way to Port Sudan, after which they will be free to go anywhere," said Majwok.

The bishop also expressed concern over his "brother," Bishop Yunan Tombe Trille Kuku Andali of El-Obeid, Sudan. The paramilitary, which controls the southern part of the city and western water supply, has increased water shortages. In June, the fighters tightened their control of the exit and entry points of the city.

"The people have to depend on very salty water," the bishop said. Andali "wanted to leave because of the water issue. He has not been able to," Majwok emphasized.

In June, Andali had told the other bishops that there was not even a clue to the light of dialogue that could bring hope for the Sudanese.

"We hear them (the leaders) say: 'Unless we defeat the other group, we don't put down weapons.' Time has come for them to think of the people and the nation," Andali said.