

South Sudanese church to remain united

Francis Njuguna Catholic News Service | Jul. 7, 2011

NAIROBI, Kenya -- Sudanese Cardinal Gabriel Zubeir Wako told bishops from East Africa that the Catholic Church will remain united when Southern Sudan becomes independent July 9.

"Politically, the nation will be divided into two -- the old and the new Sudan -- but, religiously, the two Sudans will remain united," said the cardinal from Khartoum, the Sudanese capital.

During the meeting, Bishop Rudolf Deng Majak of Wau, Southern Sudan, told Catholic News Service that he and other bishops were looking forward to the birth of the new nation.

"I never thought that this would happen in our lifetime," he said.

He told CNS the country's liberation war of more than 20 years had resulted in massive killings, suffering and humiliation, but the fruit of the people's labor was about to be seen.

Bishop Deng appealed to the church within and outside Africa to come help the Sudanese.

"We are short of everything ... the church personnel, the clergy, religious men and women and professionally trained lay people. We are equally short of church structures such as churches, schools and hospitals," he said.

Asked what his message would be to his fellow Sudanese as they await for the birth of their new nation, Bishop Deng was quick to say: "Hard work and readiness to reconcile to each other. This would be very central in the building of the new nation."

The two bishops attended the June 27-July 6 plenary of the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa, or AMECEA. Members include bishops' conferences from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Malawi, Kenya, Tanzania, Sudan, Uganda and Zambia; Djibouti and Somalia are affiliate members.

In a statement at the end of the meeting, the bishops expressed solidarity with the new Republic of South Sudan, as it will be known, and said it should be a model of tolerance and unity in diversity.

"We pray that all categories of people and groups in the new Republic of South Sudan will lay down arms, embrace peace and work toward nation-building," the bishops said.

They also said they were "saddened by the unending war in Somalia" and prayed for its people and for a peaceful resolution.

They committed themselves to establishing more schools -- primary through university level -- and to providing more chaplains to schools and military institutions.

The bishops also thanked the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops for its "generous initiative and willingness to work with AMECEA in various fields with the view to enhance capacity-building in our institutions." The

Africans pledged to make their institutions more transparent and said, "This spirit of brotherhood and solidarity will surely transform our regional, national and diocesan institutions for better."

Patrick Markey, head of the U.S. bishops' office that administers funds for Africa, said that, in addition to the money from the yearly U.S. collection for the continent, his office had received a private donation of \$500,000 that would be used to support a pilot program focusing on pastoral educational initiatives in East Africa.

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