



# The Holy See

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**APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS**  
**TO THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO AND SOUTH SUDAN**  
**(ECUMENICAL PEACE PILGRIMAGE TO SOUTH SUDAN)**

[31 January - 5 February 2023]

**MEETING WITH AUTHORITIES, CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS**

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS**

*Garden of the Presidential Palace (Juba)*

*Friday, 3rd February 2023*

**[Multimedia]**

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*Mr President,  
Honourable Vice-Presidents,  
Honourable Members of Government and the Diplomatic Corps,  
Eminent Religious and Civil Authorities,  
Distinguished Representatives of Civil Society and the World of Culture,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Thank you, Mr President, for your kind words. I am pleased to be in this country, which has a special place in my heart. I am grateful to you, Mr President, for your welcome, and I offer a cordial greeting to each of you, and through you, to all the men and women living in this young and beloved country. I have come here as a pilgrim of reconciliation, in the hope of accompanying you on your journey of peace. It is a circuitous journey, yet one that can no longer be postponed. Nor am I here by myself, for in peace as in life, we all journey together. So I have come with two brothers, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, whom I thank for all that they will say to us. Together, stretching out our hands, we present ourselves to you and to this people in the name of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace.

We undertook this *ecumenical pilgrimage of peace* after hearing the plea of an entire people that, with great dignity, weeps for the violence it endures, its persistent lack of security, its poverty and the natural disasters that it has experienced. Years of war and conflict seem never to end and recently, even yesterday, there have been bitter clashes. At the same time, the process of reconciliation seems stagnant and the promise of peace unfulfilled. May this protracted suffering not be in vain; may the patience and the sacrifices of the South Sudanese, this young, humble and courageous people, challenge everyone and, like the seeds sown in the soil that give life to plants, allow peace to blossom and bear fruit. Brothers and sisters, it is time for peace!

Fruits and vegetation abound here, thanks to the great river that passes through the country. What the ancient historian Herodotus said of Egypt, namely, that it can be called a “gift of the Nile” also applies to South Sudan. Truly, as you are wont to say, this is a “land of great abundance”. I would like to take up the image of this great river that crosses the country, a young nation but one with an ancient history. Over the centuries, explorers have ventured into this region to go up the White Nile in search of the sources of the longest river in the world. It is precisely from the search for the sources of our life together that I would like to begin my journey with you. This land, which abounds in so many riches, in its soil but above all in the hearts and minds of its people, nowadays needs to be watered anew by fresh and life-giving springs.

You, distinguished leaders, are these springs: the springs that water the life of the community, the fathers and mothers of this young country. You are called to renew the life of society as pure sources of prosperity and peace, so greatly needed for the sons and daughters of South Sudan. They need fathers, not overlords; they need steady steps towards development, not constant collapses. May the time that followed the birth of the country, its painful childhood, lead to a peaceful maturity: it is time. Dear authorities, those “sons and daughters”, and history itself, will remember you if you work for the benefit of this people that you have been called to serve. Future generations will either venerate your names or cancel their memory, based on what you now do. For just as the Nile leaves its sources to begin its course, so the course of history will leave behind the enemies of peace and bring renown to those who are true peacemakers. Indeed, as Scripture tell us, “there is posterity for the man of peace” (cf. *Ps 37:37*).

Violence, on the other hand, turns back the course of history. Herodotus himself spoke of the intergenerational disruption brought on by war, when children no longer bury their parents, but parents bury their children (cf. *Histories*, I, 87). In order that this land may not turn into a cemetery, but become once more a luxuriant garden, I beg you, with all my heart, to accept four simple words: not my words, but those of Christ. He himself spoke them in a garden, in Gethsemane, when, to a disciple of his who had drawn a sword, he cried: “No more of this!” (*Lk 22:51*). Dear President and Vice-Presidents, in the name of God, of the God to whom we prayed together in Rome, of the God who is gentle and humble in heart (cf. *Mt 11:29*), the God in whom so many people of this beloved country believe, now is the time to say “*No more of this*”, without “ifs” or “buts”. No more bloodshed, no more conflicts, no more violence and mutual recriminations about

who is responsible for it, no more leaving your people athirst for peace. No more destruction: it is time to build! Leave the time of war behind and let a time of peace dawn! And in this regard, Mr. President, I remember that evening conversation we had years ago in Uganda: your desire for peace was there... Let us move forward on this!

Let us think again of the sources of the river, to those waters that symbolize life. The sources of this country, and the course undertaken by the South Sudanese people on 9 July 2011, call to mind another word: *Republic*. Yet what does it mean to be a Republic, a *res publica*? It means seeing yourselves as truly “public”, “of the people”; it is to declare that the state belongs to everyone; and consequently those entrusted with greater responsibilities, presiding over and governing it, have the duty to place themselves at the service of the common good. That is the purpose of power: to serve the community. Yet there is always a temptation to use power for our own advantage. So it is not enough simply to be called a Republic; it is necessary to be one, starting with the primary goods. The abundant resources with which God has blessed this land should not be restricted to a few, but recognized as the legacy of all, and plans for economic recovery should coincide with proposals for an equitable distribution of wealth.

The growth of a sound democracy is essential to the life of a Republic. It preserves the healthy distinction of powers in such a way that, for example, those who administer justice can do so without interference from those who legislate or govern. In addition, democracy presupposes respect for human rights, upheld by law and the application of law, particularly the right to the freedom of self-expression. It should be kept in mind that *there is no peace without justice* (cf. SAINT JOHN PAUL II, *Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace*, 1 January 2002), but also that *there is no justice without freedom*. Every citizen, therefore, should be enabled to make the most of the unique and unrepeatable gift of his or her life, and be provided with suitable means of doing so. In the words of Pope John XXIII: “Every human being has the right to life, to bodily integrity and to the means necessary for the proper development of life” (*Pacem in Terris*, 11).

The Nile, leaving its sources, and passing through some uneven terrain that creates waterfalls and rapids, enters the South Sudanese plain and, near Juba, becomes navigable, before entering more boggy areas. In a similar way, I trust that the Republic’s path to peace will not proceed unevenly, but, starting from this capital, will take a course that can be navigated and not be bogged down by inertia. Dear friends, it is time to move from words to deeds. It is time to turn the page: it is the time for *commitment* to an urgent and much-needed transformation. The process of peace and reconciliation requires a new start. May an understanding be reached and progress be made in moving forward with the Peace Accord and the Road Map! In a world scarred by divisions and conflict, this country is hosting an ecumenical pilgrimage of peace, which is something rare; it represents *a change of direction*, an opportunity for South Sudan to resume sailing in calm waters, taking up dialogue, without duplicity and opportunism. May it be for everyone an occasion *to revive hope*, not only for the government, but for everyone. Let each citizen understand that the time has

come to stop being carried along by the tainted waters of hatred, tribalism, regionalism and ethnic differences. Brothers and sisters, it is time to sail together towards the future! Together. We must not forget this word: together.

The course of the great river can also suggest a way to move forward. Along its way, the Nile joins another river at Lake No, forming the so-called White Nile. It's transparently clear waters, then, arise from an *encounter*. Dear brothers and sisters, this is the path to take: to respect one another, to get to know one another and to engage in dialogue. Behind every form of violence, there is anger and resentment, and behind every form of anger and resentment, there is the unhealed memory of wounds, humiliations and wrongs. It follows that the only way to break free of these is through encounter, the culture of encounter: by accepting others as our brothers and sisters and making room for them, even if it means taking a step backwards. This attitude, which is essential for any peace process, is also indispensable for the cohesive development of society. In the passage from the barbarity of confrontation to a culture of vital encounter, *young people* have a decisive role to play. Consequently, they should be provided with open spaces of encounter for meeting and discussion. May they fearlessly take hold of the future which is theirs! Then too, women, mothers who know how life is generated and safeguarded, need to be increasingly involved in political life and decision-making processes. Women need to be respected, for anyone who commits an act of violence towards a woman commits it towards God, who took flesh from a woman.

Christ, the Word incarnate, taught us that the more we make ourselves little, by making room for others and by welcoming every neighbour as a brother or sister, the greater we become in the eyes of the Lord. The young history of this country, torn by ethnic clashes, needs to discover *the mystique of encounter*, the grace of the whole. There is a need to look beyond groups and differences in order to journey as one people, which, as in the Nile, is enriched by the contribution of its various tributaries. It was precisely by the river that, more than a century ago, the first missionaries came to these shores, followed over time by many humanitarian workers. I want to thank all of them for the valuable work they do. At the same time, I think of those missionaries who, sad to say, encounter death while sowing life. Let us not forget them and let us not forget to ensure for them and for humanitarian workers the security and support they need for their charitable works, so that the river of goodness may continue to flow.

A great river, however, can at times overflow and cause disasters. Tragically, this has been the experience of the many victims of floods in this country. I express my closeness to them, and appeal that they not lack the help they need. Natural disasters tell the tale of a nature that is battered and wounded, and from being a source of life, can turn into a deadly menace. We need the foresight to care for creation, for the sake of future generations. I think, in particular, of the need to combat the deforestation caused by profiteering.

To prevent a river from flooding, its bed has to be kept clean. Leaving behind the metaphor, the

cleaning needed by the flow of life in society is represented by *the battle against corruption*. The inequitable distribution of funds, secret schemes to get rich, patronage deals, lack of transparency: all these pollute the riverbed of human society; they divert resources from the very things most needed. Before all else, there is a need to combat poverty, which serves as the fertile soil in which hatred, divisions and violence take root. The pressing need of any civilized country is to care for its citizens, especially the most vulnerable and the disadvantaged. Here I think especially of the millions of displaced persons who live here: how many people have had to flee their homes, and now find themselves consigned to the margins of life as a result of conflicts and forced displacement!

For its life-giving waters not to turn into a deadly source of danger, it is essential that the course of a river be controlled by suitable embankments. The same is true for human coexistence. Above all, there is a need to control the flow of weapons that, despite bans, continue to arrive in many countries in the area, including South Sudan: many things are needed here, but surely not more instruments of death! Other forms of embankment are essential in order to control the healthy flow of social life. Here, I would mention the development of suitable healthcare policies, the need for vital infrastructures and especially the primary goal of promoting literacy and education, the only way that the children of this land will be able to take their future into their own hands. Like all the children of this continent and of the world, they have the right to grow up holding in their hands notebooks and toys, not weapons and tools for labour.

Finally, the White Nile leaves South Sudan, passes through other countries, joins the Blue Nile and then flows into the sea. Rivers know no borders; they connect different territories. In a similar way, in order to achieve a suitable development, it is essential, now more than ever, to foster positive relationships with other countries, starting with those in the area. Here, I think too of the precious contribution made by the international community to this country, and I express my gratitude for the efforts made to promote reconciliation and development. I am convinced that, for those contributions to be fruitful, a genuine understanding of social processes and problems is essential. It is not enough to analyze and report on them from afar; there is a need to be directly involved, with patience and determination and, more generally, to resist the temptation to impose pre-established models alien to local realities. As [Saint John Paul II said thirty years ago in Sudan](#): “African solutions must be found to African problems” ([Address at the Welcome Ceremony](#), 10 February 1993).

Mr President, distinguished authorities, in tracing the course of the Nile, I wanted to venture along the path of this country, as young as it is beloved. I realize that some of what I have had to say may appear blunt and direct, but please, know that this arises from the affection and concern with which I follow the life of your country, together with my brothers with whom I have come here as a pilgrim of peace. We wish to offer you our heartfelt prayers and our support, so that South Sudan can experience reconciliation and a change of direction. May its vital course no longer be overwhelmed by the flood of violence, mired in the swamps of corruption and blocked by the

inundation of poverty. May the Lord of heaven, who loves this land, grant it a new season of peace and prosperity. God bless the Republic of South Sudan! Thank you.

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