



FDNSC united together for JPIC

FDNSC Generalate, Rome

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Dear Sisters and Friends,

While Sr. Marife and Sr. Merle were on visitation in South Sudan, here in Rome Pope Francis and several JPIC groups drew our attention to the situation of war in South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Of course, the fact that we have sisters in these countries makes us even more attentive to the suffering of people there.

In this Bulletin you can read about the situation in these countries and about the related activities in Rome. This is followed by “Did you know....”, which informs you about some works and actions within our Congregation and finally you will find the events on the World Justice and Peace Calendar, which this time will provide a little text for you to reflect on during that particular day. We will conclude this letter with a prayer of Pope Francis for South Sudan and Congo.

The situation in South Sudan and Congo



During the **prayer service of November 23, 2017** Pope Francis asked us to raise our awareness of the urgent need for peace in the world and especially in these two countries and to suggest concrete actions through dialogue. As a response, a **“Round table dialogue for South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo”** was organized. This event was hosted by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and took place on **January 18, 2018** from 4pm until 7pm.

Sr. Margaret and Sr. Elly participated on behalf of the Generalate.

But what is the situation in South Sudan and Congo? The website “Global Conflict Tracker” of the Council of Foreign Relations informs us about **the recent developments in South Sudan:**

“Well over 50,000 people have been killed and more than 1.6 million have been internally displaced since civil war broke out in South Sudan in December 2013. Under the threat of international sanctions and following several rounds of negotiations supported by the



Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), President Salva Kiir signed a peace agreement with rebel leader and former Vice President Riek Machar on August 26, 2015. As the first step toward ending the civil war, Machar returned to Juba on April 26, 2016 and was sworn in as Vice President, after spending more than two years outside of the country. Soon after his return, violence broke out again between government forces and opposition factions in July 2016, displacing tens of thousands of people yet again. After Machar fled the country, Kiir replaced him as Vice President with General Taban Deng Gai. After intense fighting in July 2016, the UN Security Council authorized a 4,000 strong regional protection force which, after being blocked by the South Sudanese government, was deployed in summer 2017.

The August 2015 peace deal collapsed and the future of the transitional government remains uncertain. After signing the agreement in August 2015, violence continued and both sides of the conflict blamed the other for violating the cease-fire. The peace talks, which began in January 2014, resulted in several agreements, but both parties to the conflict and other splinter factions repeatedly violated the cease-fires.

Armed groups, including the government's Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), have committed widespread violence against civilians, especially women and children, humanitarian workers, and peacekeepers. As of August 2016, around 200,000 people are seeking protection on UN bases, which have become displacement-like settlements known as protection of civilian sites, in areas such as Bentiu, Juba, and Malakal.



Recent developments in the Democratic Republic of Congo can be read on the same website. At least seventy armed groups are believed to be currently operating in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Despite the stabilizing presence of nineteen thousand UN peacekeepers, the stronger militant groups in the region, like the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) and the Ugandan Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), continue to terrorize communities and control weakly governed areas of the country, financing their activities by exploiting the country's rich natural resources. Millions of civilians have been forced to flee the fighting: the United Nations estimates that currently there are at least 2.7 million internally displaced persons in the DRC, and approximately 450,000 DRC refugees in other nations.



In addition to the violence caused by armed groups, President Joseph Kabila caused further political instability by postponing the scheduled 2016 election as he sought to stay in power after his term ended. In December 2015, Kabila called for "political dialogue" with opposition parties, but the police violently cracked down on internal dissent. This crackdown included the November 2015 use of tear gas against student protesters and the breakup of a January 2015

protest, in which police fired shots and killed over forty people. Moise Katumbi, a popular opposition leader who was governor of the mineral-rich Katanga province, declared his candidacy for the presidential election in early May 2015. Since his announcement, mass protests and clashes between the police and civilians became increasingly tense and common. In September 2016, forty-four people were killed during protests and government security forces burned down the headquarters of the main opposition party.”

On March 11, 2018 www.enca.com (a 24-hour television news broadcaster, owned by e.tv, focusing on South African and African stories) wrote: Democratic Republic of Congo opposition groups rallied behind exiled figure Moise Katumbi at talks in South Africa aimed at forging a united front to fight elections due by the end of the year. Exiled Katumbi led dozens of opposition leaders at the three-day meeting in Johannesburg to map out a strategy for the planned December 23 election to replace President Joseph Kabila. "What brings us here is the rejection of the dictatorship that has taken root in our beautiful country and the desire to build a better world for our compatriots,"

One of the speakers during **the Round Table Dialogue** was Sr. Orla Treacy IBVM, Principal of Loreto Secondary School in Rumbek, South Sudan, whom Sr. Marife and Sr. Merle met during their visitation. Sr. Orla spoke of the challenges for girls, especially in the issue of forced marriage. She said: “We live in a time of war, a time of hunger and a time when one might wonder about human rights. There is much injustice, but for me working with young people and girls in particular the greatest injustice we face each day is that of forced marriage.”



During the same meeting two statues of our Blessed Mother, which the Pope had blessed during the prayer service in St. Peter’s Square, were presented by Bishop Paolo Lojudice to both the representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Archbishop Utembi, and to Fr.



Maurice Ibiko of South Sudan, as a symbol of our solidarity with the people of South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. These statues are copies of Our Lady of Valmi in Spain, meaning Our Lady of Help. We are all confident that Our Lady will help to build peace, especially in these two countries. These statues will be taken to South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as a sign of fraternity and of mutual commitment to peace, with the help of the Holy Mother of God.

At the conclusion of the Angelus on **February 4** and also on **February 11, 2018** Pope Francis made the following official announcement: *“In view of the tragic continuation of conflicts in different parts of the world, I invite all the faithful to undertake a special day of prayer and fasting for peace. This will take place on 23rd February, Friday of the first week of Lent.”*

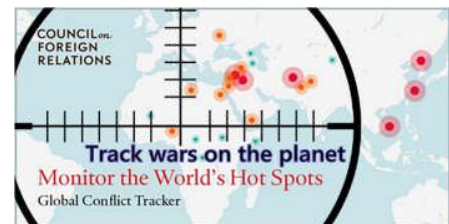
The Holy Father indicated that this day would be offered *“especially for the people of the Democratic Republic of Congo and of South Sudan”* because the situation of conflict in these two African countries are particularly affecting the Catholic Church.

While still in South Sudan, Sr. Marife supported this request by sending a letter to the whole Congregation asking all the sisters to participate.



Did you know.....?

On the website global conflict tracker (www.cfr.org/interactives/global-conflict-tracker#) you can read more background information about the conflict in DR Congo and in South Sudan as well as all the other conflict zones in the world. The site is regularly updated.



On February 11, 2018 the Congolese Catholic Chaplaincy of Rome, the Congolese community of priests and religious, and the Congolese lay associations were joined by friends and supporters in a march. After celebrating mass at the Congolese Church, over 350 persons, including Sr. Madeleine from the Generalate, marched to St. Peter’s Square to raise awareness about the critical situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to thank Pope Francis for his prayerful support and concern for the ongoing conflicts in that country.



Two of our Sisters, Sr. Rita Grunke and Sr. Wendy Violet, are still working in South Sudan. Although they live in a relatively peaceful area they are confronted daily by the plight of hungry and sick people. One of their many apostolates is feeding the poor and the lepers. Sr. Marife and Sr. Merle visited Sr. Rita and Sr. Wendy from **12 until 21 February**. You can read more in the visitation report.



In the Democratic Republic of Congo we have 42 sisters. Sr. Marife and Sr. Madeleine will go there in November for the canonical visitation.

We continue to pray for the sisters and their people in these countries.



In gratitude to and support for Pope Francis, the Congolese Community, JPIC Commission and Solidarity with South Sudan prepared times of prayer to be in solidarity with DR Congo and South Sudan on **February 23**. About 100 Congolese and supporters gathered in the Congolese Church (Nativity Church in Piazza Pasquino) for vespers and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament for an hour before silently marching to San Marcello Church for a prayer service. Approximately 300 people participated in a prayer which reflected on the mission of Jesus, the pain of

conflicts and our call to “Building Peace Together”. While Sr. Madeleine participated in this event, we had a special prayer service in the Generalate.

Events on the JPIC Calendar

June 4, International Day of Innocent Children Victims of Aggression: It is a sad reality that



in situations where armed conflict breaks out, it is the most vulnerable members of societies – namely children, who are most affected by the consequences of war. The six most common violations are recruitment and use of children in war, killing, sexual violence, abduction, attacks on schools and hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access.

Abdurrahim (12), lost his right hand and the sight in his left eye when he and his friends played with an unexploded ordnance in their village in South Sudan.

The purpose of this day is to acknowledge the pain suffered by children throughout the world who are the victims of physical, mental and emotional abuse. This day affirms the UN's commitment to protect the rights of children.

June 20, World Refugee Day: This day is celebrated every year to support millions of families all over the world who have lost their homes and dear ones because of violence or war. Fresh waves of unrest in the Democratic Republic of Congo have displaced over 1.9 million people since January 2017 – chiefly in the Kasai, Tanganyika and Kivu regions. Tens of thousands more have fled to Angola, Zambia and other neighbouring countries. People are fleeing their homes at a worrying pace, as worsening violence destroys lives and livelihoods across the country.



Watch the video at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wg66U3eqbm4

Add your name to the #With Refugees petition to send a clear message to decision makers that they must act with solidarity and shared responsibility.

Go to: www.unhcr.org/withrefugees/petition

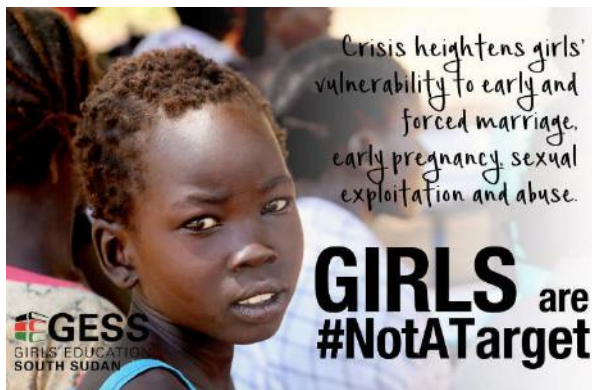
July 18, Nelson Mandela International Day: Nelson Mandela said: “It is time for the next generations to continue our struggle against social injustice and for the rights of humanity. It is in your hands.” Each of us can make a small difference. If we all make a difference together, our collective effort can truly change the world. Mandela Day is not a holiday. It is a day for all of us to opt into humanity – to roll up our sleeves and play an active role in building our communities. This is an opportunity for each of us to share Nelson Mandela’s vision of a better future for all.

Pax Christi’s member organisation, “Les Amis de Nelson MANDELA pour la Défense des Droits Humains” (ANMDH) organised a conference held on 25 January 2018 in Saint Joseph Parish in Kinshasa. It was titled "The exercise of civil liberties in the DRC and the events of 31 December 2017 and 21 January 2018". ANMDH is interested in human rights monitoring of certain deplorable situations in the DRC, such as the theft and sale of children by mafia networks in 2013 and 2014, and violations of human rights during the 2011 electoral process.



Following the despicable acts of January when the police fired point-blank at the protesters and unnecessarily used tear gas canisters in Catholic parishes and some health centers in Kinshasa, the ANMDH encouraged people to continue to claim their fundamental rights by nonviolence and to collaborate effectively so that the authors of such crimes do not remain unpunished.

July 30, World Day against Trafficking in Persons: the purpose of this day is to “raise awareness of the situation of victims of human trafficking and for the promotion and protection of their rights.” According to the 2016 UN report, women and girls tend to be trafficked for marriages and sexual slavery, while men and boys are typically exploited for forced labor in the mining sector, as porters, and as soldiers. It also states that refugees from war and persecution are particularly vulnerable to becoming victims of human trafficking.



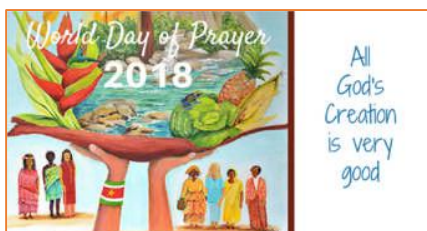
Rebecca, one of Sr. Orla’s students in South Sudan, was forced to marry. When Sr. Orla visited her Rebecca was hysterical, she talked of suicide – she told Sr. Orla how she had been tied up, beaten and brought to the man’s house. Sr. Orla could do little except reassure Rebecca that she cared about her. Sr. Orla talked with the man’s family and pleaded that they allow her to return to school to at least finish her exams but Rebecca never came back to school.

August 30, International Day of Victims of Enforced Disappearances: Enforced disappearance is used as a strategy to spread terror within the society. It occurs when people are

arrested, detained or abducted against their will and when governments refuse to disclose the whereabouts of these people. Dong Samuel Luak, a well-respected South Sudanese human rights lawyer and activist and Aggrey Idri, a vocal government critic and member of the opposition, disappeared off the streets of Nairobi on January 23 and 24, 2017, respectively. They are believed to have been abducted by or at the request of South Sudanese officials.



September 1, World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation: Pope Francis said, “The annual World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation offers to individual believers and to the community



a precious opportunity to renew our personal participation in this vocation as custodians of Creation, raising to God our thanks for the marvellous works that He has entrusted to our care, invoking His help for the protection of creation and his mercy for the sins committed against the world in which we live.”

September 15, International Day of Democracy: Democracy is a universal value based on the freely spoken and expressed will of people to determine their own political, economic, social and cultural systems in all aspects of their lives. Evolved over centuries, democracies share many common features but cannot be reduced to a single model. In short, democracy pertains the idea that everyone has the right to have their own beliefs, and to say and write what they think. Every year on the 15th September, the United Nations celebrates these ideas on the International Day of Democracy.



In the latest development of the Democratic Republic of Congo’s (DRC) political saga, a government spokesperson has said that President Joseph Kabila will announce his intended successor this July. He continued that the elections scheduled for December are on track and that Kabila, in power since 2001, intends to step down after they are held.

According to the constitution, Kabila’s mandated term ended back in December 2016.

However, his administration simply failed to organise elections and has embarked on various attempts to keep the president in power.

This has prompted widespread non-violent urban protests, which have met with harsh repression and deadly force. At the same time, rural militia groups have grown in size and expanded the areas under their control.

September 21, International Day of Peace: is dedicated to world peace, specifically to strengthening the ideals of peace, both within and among all nations and peoples.

“We know that it is not enough to open our hearts to the suffering of others,” Pope Francis said. “Much more remains to be done before our brothers and sisters can once again live peacefully in a safe home.” Pope Francis suggested a strategy that could help states offer “asylum seekers, refugees, migrants and victims of human trafficking an opportunity to find the peace they seek.” He summarized this strategy in four distinct concrete actions: welcoming, protecting, promoting and integrating.



Prayer for South Sudan and Congo

taken from Pope Francis' Homily on November 23, 2017



As Saint Paul reminded us a little while ago, Jesus Christ “*is our peace*” (*Eph 2:14*). On the cross, he took upon himself all the evil of the world, including the sins that spawn and fuel wars: pride, greed, lust for power, lies... Jesus conquered all this by his resurrection. Appearing in the midst of his friends, he says: “Peace be with you (*Jn 20:19.21.26*). He repeats those same words to us this evening: “Peace be with you!”

Without you, Lord, our prayer would be in vain, and our hope for peace an illusion. But you are alive. You are at work for us and with us. You are our peace!

May the risen Lord break down the walls of hostility that today divide brothers and sisters, especially in South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

May he comfort those women who are the victims of violence in war zones and throughout the world.

May he protect children who suffer from conflicts in which they have no part, but which rob them of their childhood and at times of life itself. How hypocritical it is to deny the mass murder of women and children! It is here that war shows its most horrid face.

May the Lord help all the little ones and the poor of our world to continue to believe and trust that the kingdom of God is at hand, in our midst, and is “justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (*Rom 14:17*). May he sustain all those who day by day strive to combat evil with good, and with words and deeds of fraternity, respect, encounter and solidarity.

May the Lord strengthen in government officials and all leaders a spirit which is noble, upright, steadfast and courageous in seeking peace through dialogue and negotiation.

May the Lord enable all of us to be peacemakers wherever we find ourselves, in our families, in school, at work, in the community, in every setting. “Let us wash the feet” of one another, in imitation of our Master and Lord. To him be glory and praise, now and forever. Amen.