

*Visit Report: Abyei, Sudan and South Sudan*

**“THERE WAS NO-ONE TO PROTECT US”**



Survivors of the massacre in Kolom, Abyei on Wednesday 22 January



Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust  
January 2020

## Messages from civilians during our visit.

### ABYEI

#### Kolom Village

*"We feared an attack at any moment, so we asked the local UN peacekeepers whether we should hide in the bush. But they told us not to worry and to stay in our homes."*

Survivor of the massacre in Kolom

*"We are heartbroken. They burn our homes to occupy our land. We have never known anything like it."*

Survivor of the massacre in Kolom

#### Agok

*"We have suffered for so many years. The army killed people randomly. Women were kidnapped. Cattle was stolen... There is so much hatred and suffering within and between communities."*

Head of the Mothers' Union in Agok

*"Most people are traumatised by war and famine. Children have lost their parents. They roam around without shoes, vulnerable and naked"*

Head of the Mothers' Union in Agok

### SUDAN: BLUE NILE STATE

*"We are awaiting famine this year. Our current harvest will only last us two months."*

Hayat, a local resident in Blue Nile

*"When people are sick, they have to walk for 12 hours to the Samaritan's Purse hospital in Doro. Many resort to using natural medicine and as a result people are dying."*

Unan Saman, Secretary of Information for Blue Nile

*"Referring to this specific time being potentially decisive for political change in Sudan, the situation is better by far than before."*

Yasir Arman, Deputy Chairman of SPLM-N

### SOUTH SUDAN

*"The newly roofed classrooms (funded by Guernsey OADC) have been very well received by the community. The students who were learning under trees now have uninterrupted lessons and can concentrate much better."*

Peter Akook, Project Coordinator for the Diocese of Wau

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**WARNING: REPORT CONTAINS GRAPHIC PHOTOS**

## About HART

Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust (HART) exists to support those suffering conflict and persecution in places with no international media attention who are generally not served by major aid organisations. We believe that, in order best to meet their needs, humanitarian assistance must be provided by local people primarily involve local people, supported by HART with aid and advocacy. The concerns outlined below seek to reflect priorities of our partners in Sudan and South Sudan.

## Executive Summary

- This is a decisive moment in the history of the Sudanese Peoples, not only politically but also in humanitarian matters, and in the hope for development in all its forms.
  - “The situation is better by far for Sudan than before”, spoken by one leader.
- It is important to recognise the great significance of the ‘signed agreement’ between the new transitional government in **Khartoum** and negotiators of the SPLM-N (Malik Agar’s faction).
- **Abyei**, however, remains no closer to a national or international resolution, and remains without policing or international humanitarian support due to the contention of Sudan.
- Humanitarian needs in **Abyei** and the **Blue Nile area** are urgent.
  - “Famine approaches”, leaders declare.
- The 30 year-legacy of the Bashir regime and its international support continues in some regions, and regime change in Khartoum will not change this terrible legacy overnight.
- Local leaders tell us that the Bashir legacy of atrocities has destroyed or significantly undermined the traditional resolution of tribal difficulties and of criminal acts, through negotiation by elders, and practices such as ‘blood money’.
- The need is urgent to resolve issues over oil and revenue sharing to enhance further general political resolutions, and thereby encourage humanitarian and economic development.
  - Development of all kinds is contingent on ‘peace’ and security.
- Education is still repeatedly emphasised by people in Abyei, South Sudan and in The Two Areas (Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile State) as the priority, particularly regarding female access to education and the availability of secondary education.

## Regional and National Backgrounds

### Abyei

This region is located on the border between South Sudan and Sudan and suffers greatly from a failure to reach an agreement about its location. In 1905, Abyei was

administratively transferred from Bahr el Ghazal in the South to Kordofan in the North of the country by the British Administration in order to reduce incidences of South Sudanese slave trading by Arab slave traders. Sadly, it is clear that this did not result in any reduction of the prevalence of the slave trade by Arabs against Africans.

A referendum in 2013 saw 99.9% of voters wanting to join South Sudan but the vote was not recognised by the international community as it was organised by the people of Abyei themselves without involving the Sudanese Government and excluded the Misseriya tribespeople from voting. The resulting lack of recognition continues to cause severe problems for the local people, including a lack of access by major aid organisations with an impending famine and absence of any police force.

Whilst visiting the disputed region of Abyei, we awoke to devastating news that a nearby village had just been attacked (see pages 2-7).

### **Sudan**

Following the removal of Sudan's long-time ruler Omar al Bashir, military and civilian leaders signed a deal last year as part of a 39-month transition to democracy. Although there is positive momentum behind the peace talks, conflict and human rights violations continue.

We visited Blue Nile State to obtain first-hand evidence of the needs and suffering of local people, who are desperate for food aid as their harvest had been destroyed by flooding. Subsequent restoration of some of the crops was ruined by 'insects'.

### **South Sudan**

South Sudan's civil war began in December 2013. It was triggered by a political dispute between President Salva Kiir's Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and the opposition force led by Vice President Riek Machar.

The warring parties recently committed to forming a Transitional Government of National Unity by the (extended) deadline of February 2020. It is hoped this will lay the foundations for the next steps of the country's peace process and political transition.

## **HART 2020 VISIT REPORTS**

### **1. ABYEI**

#### **Massacre in Kolom**

On Wednesday 22 January, just after 7am, nomadic Islamist Misseriya herders attacked the Christian Dinka village of Kolom in the disputed Abyei region on the Sudan-South Sudan border.

The herders arrived on tuk-tuks and motorbikes, armed with assault rifles and two RPG-7s. They killed 32 villagers, injured a further 24 people and abducted 15 children, aged between 2 and 12. They also burned 22 tukuls (homes) and destroyed the local church and clinic.



Survivors in mourning as they begin to cover the charred and mutilated bodies.

We visited the village just after the attack. Many homes were still burning with burnt bodies inside as we witnessed the digging of mass graves for the charred and mutilated corpses. Survivors told us that, prior to the attack, they wanted to flee to the bush for safety as they had seen Arab Misseriya tribespeople in the vicinity. But they were urged by UNISFA (the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei) not to take this course of action.

- *“Six of our elders spoke with the UN on Tuesday night to warn them about an imminent attack by the Arab militants. The next day, all six of the elders were killed. Why didn’t the UN protect us?”*
- *“We feared an attack at any moment, so we asked the local UN peacekeepers*



*whether we should hide in the bush. But they told us not to worry and to stay in our homes. The UN left at 6:10am and the attack happened an hour later. The peacekeepers failed to protect us.”*

- *“If the UN will not protect us, then we must defend ourselves. Perpetrators must be brought to justice, otherwise there is a risk of retaliation. We are full of fear that there will be more violence and more deaths.”*



Baroness Cox and the HART team arrived in Kolom just after the massacre.

Given that UNISFA (the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei) are mandated to protect civilians in Abyei, local people were profoundly indignant and deeply angered by the failure of so-called peacekeepers to provide adequate security. Survivors told us that Arab militias are supported by the military regime in Khartoum, which reportedly provides arms to the Misseriya in order to drive the indigenous Dinka people off their land – a tension that is exacerbated by the presence of oil in the region.

**URGENT FUNDING PRIORITY:**

Many families have been displaced since the massacre, fleeing their remote villages to Abyei town for security. These families have lost their homes and livelihoods and urgently need basic food, shelter and healthcare.

**To support these affected communities, please visit the HART website and quote ‘Abyei relief’.**



David Thomas (HART Project Logistics Officer) walks through the village with huts still burning.

**Peter Osborne, a well-respected journalist, who accompanied the HART team, sent reports to Middle East Eye, claiming that Kuol Alor, the Governor of Abyei, said:**

*“Definitely, the militia are backed by Khartoum” and that the attack was the “worst atrocity I have seen” and “the intention is to burn the villages so people can be driven out.”*

**A survivor told us:** *“There have been other similar attacks [by Misseriya herders against civilian farmers] but this massacre was on a far greater scale. It is horrific. We are heartbroken. They burn our homes to occupy our land. We have never known anything like it.”*

The crisis facing civilians in Abyei is profoundly complex and delicate. The local population has experienced years of severe suffering caused by armed conflicts, political challenges and devastating floods. There is deep concern that the horrors inflicted upon the villagers in Kolom may have far-reaching repercussions, aggravating tensions at this critical time for Sudan and South Sudan.



The local villagers begin to dig a mass grave for the victims.

We wish to express our gratitude to the Governor of Abyei, Kuol Alor who promptly ended our meeting, shortly after arrival, to take us to the massacre site. The Governor listened closely to his community who were expressing their desire for us to witness the type of tragedy that has become all too common for the people of Abyei.



## Political challenges in Abyei

This disputed region of Abyei is situated along the border between Sudan and South Sudan and is claimed by both countries.

In 2013, the Dinka ethnic group organised an unofficial and so-far unrecognised referendum, in which 99.9 per cent of voters said they wanted to join South Sudan. Only 12 out of 63,433 people voted to be part of Sudan. However, the results were not recognised by Sudan or the international community as the nomadic Misseriya people were not included. The local people argue that the Misseriya are nomadic and do not live in Abyei, thus holding no legitimacy as citizens to vote in the referendum.

### **Kuol Alor, Chief Administrator of Abyei, said:**

*"We are afflicted by floods. Our crops and homes are destroyed. As we rebuild, we desperately need help. We have no good roads, our schools are destroyed and the water system is toxic. Many children are orphaned. We have 40 primary schools but are unable to provide textbooks or other resources.*

*"International organisations are confused about who is responsible for Abyei. In the last five years, the British government has been supporting girls' education in South Sudan. But Abyei has received nothing. We begged with the British ambassador but they said that it won't go to Abyei as we are a 'disputed territory' and they can't get involved. Up until today, Abyei is excluded from the programme. For us it is very clear, we are part of South Sudan and our support should come from Juba not Khartoum.*

*"If our referendum is recognised, it will finally bring stability. But right now, when our people try to return home to north of Abyei, they are attacked by militia who want to keep their stolen land. We need development and security. Security is a priority. But the presence of government soldiers in Abyei is a problem. They bring militias. People are killed at the border. The UN has said that Abyei must have a police force, but this has not happened. We must be one of the only communities in the world without a police force.*



An example of destruction in Abyei: demolished school latrines that were ruined by the floods in 2019.

### A note from Bishop Michael Deng Bol of Abyei

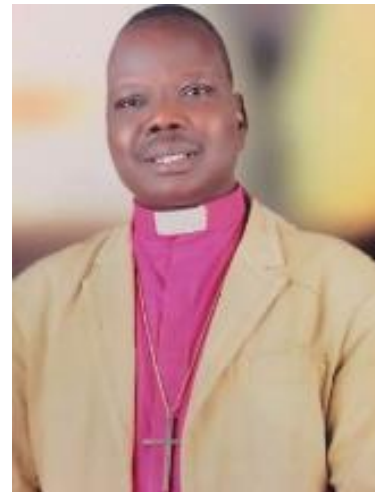
**Renewed tensions and violence:** “The recent massacre in Kolom, Abyei [in the presence of UN forces] is very similar to the assassination of Mr. Kuol Adol, the Paramount Chief of Ngok Dinka Chiefdom, who was killed by Arab militias on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2013 in the presence of fully equipped UN forces.”

“Lady Cox and the HART team arrived just in time. We thank God that the very eyes of Lady Cox and her team (advocates for peace, vulnerable people and the voiceless) have seen the recent killing in Kolom, the very situation that the people of Abyei have been facing for years.

Abyei region is inhabited mostly by traumatised orphans and street kids, widows and the wounded due to the legacy of barbaric killings of innocent civilians in the area. Everyone is traumatised.

Being a Church, our ultimate objectives are for peace and stability and to see the full restoration of Abyei land to the Ngok Dinka tribe that has been grabbed by the Arab Misseriya tribe.

The Church is providing basic needs to the community such as clinics, schools, peace-building initiatives, conflict management and evangelism. It’s a voice for the voiceless, addressing the needs of orphans and abandoned children in Abyei. The people of Abyei were very, very happy to welcome Caroline Cox and her team for a historical visit to the isolated region of Abyei. Our ultimate need is humanitarian assistance and educational programmes.” – **Bishop Michael Deng Bol**



Bishop Michael Deng Bol  
of Abyei

### Mothers’ Union in Agok, a few miles from Abyei town

**Angelina Nwol, Head of the Mothers’ Union in Agok, said:** “Abyei’s geographical position is what’s caused all this trouble. No one listens to us. We have a lot of resources in Abyei but we can’t benefit from them, the enemy does. This is why we can’t develop. Khartoum left us with nothing to live on, the government of Sudan used hunger as a weapon of war.

*We have suffered for so many years. The army killed people randomly. Women were kidnapped. Cattle was stolen. Our enemies now enjoy our resources: fish; oil; mining; fruits.*

*There is insecurity in the north, with risks of being enslaved, so we cannot work there.”*



Caroline Cox and David Thomas with Angelina Nwol (left), Head of the Mothers Union and Rebecca Nyeth (right), Head of Visitation to Vulnerable Areas

**Rebecca Nyeth, Head of Visitation to Vulnerable Areas in Agok, said:**

*“Access to food is a big problem. This year will be terrible as sorghum, maize and okra crops were destroyed in the floods and so we will have famine.*

*“Most people are traumatised by war and famine. Children have lost their parents. They roam around without shoes, vulnerable and naked. Some steal and are arrested and imprisoned. We have many disabled people here, from fighting and old age. The worst thing we see is elderly people in houses with no food or clothes.*

*“There is so much hatred and suffering within and between communities. Peace seems impossible. But with God, all things are possible.”*

Humanitarian aid access

We are encouraged by Sudan’s transitional government’s commitment to grant access to humanitarian organisations to Darfur and eastern Sudan. It remains unclear, however, whether this entails lifting the humanitarian embargo imposed by the al-Bashir regime on the large opposition-controlled areas of South Kordofan and Blue Nile – although we were relieved to hear that the World Food Programme delivered some aid to Blue Nile in December.

An example of destruction in Abyei: an old classroom still lies in rubble from the war.





## 2. SUDAN

### Visit to Blue Nile State

In a previous visit report (January 2017) we cited evidence of aerial bombardment by Antonov aircraft in the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile (a.k.a the Two Areas). The attacks were directed at schools, churches, mosques, villages, marketplaces and other infrastructure central to the wellbeing of the community, causing civilian deaths and forcing families to flee to locations with life-threatening conditions.

**In January 2020, we met Yahya Mahadeen, the local administrator of Chali el Fil village in Blue Nile, who said:**

*“The bombs targeted indiscriminately. If they saw livestock, they would bomb, as they knew that it meant people were near as we are subsistence farmers. We couldn’t cultivate, just hide. The bombs also targeted our healthcare facilities. So we don’t have medicine. About 100 people were killed in this village. This is not a military village, there have only ever been civilians here. The attacks only stopped last year.”*

*“We don’t have school materials for our children. Many of the schools are destroyed. There are only nine schools in this area, which is not enough. Most of the teaching is done by the church under trees. Our Teacher Training Centre was bombed. This year especially, we face hunger as the floods destroyed everything. We are normally subsistence farmers but the floods destroyed our crops. And now the little harvest that we have left is being destroyed by insects.”*



**A local resident, called Hana (left), told us:** *“I am one of the few people who remained here during the war. When the bombs came we ran to the fox holes, hid and waited for the planes to leave. That was our life. The planes could come up to four times in the day and four times in the night, so we struggled badly to sleep and live.*

*“One time I ran to the ditch at night as they bombed my house. In the ditch, I was bitten badly by scorpions and then noticed a poisonous snake was also in the ditch. Another time, I was running with my six children and we were caught between the Antinov plane and a poisonous snake in a tree. The snake spat poison into my mouth and I have not been able to speak properly since.*



We were relieved to hear that aerial attacks have not occurred since the beginning of 2017. However, the government continue to fly Antonov aircraft over the Two Areas to cause fear and dissuade refugees from returning home.

The destroyed Teacher Training Centre (above) and mosque (below) in Chali el Fil, Sudan.



There are also reports that, although levels of violence have decreased, the government of Sudan remains committed to strengthening their military capability. We heard several reports of a build-up of armed forces close to the Two Areas. This is fuelling suspicion of a renewed government offensive and has increased fears among the local people, which could result in further internal displacement and outflow of refugees.



Meeting with local administrators in Chali el Fil village in Blue Nile.



## Sudan's transition to democracy

On 17 August 2019, the Transitional Military Council (TMC) and civilian leaders signed a deal as part of a planned 39-month transition to democracy. We remain cautiously optimistic that their Constitutional Declaration will lead to the formation of a government that can guarantee peace and stability throughout Sudan. However, we share widespread concerns about whether those military and political officials associated with the former regime will prove trustworthy partners – especially given their history of repression and violence.

For example, the TMC's leader, General al-Burhan, who has been sworn in as Chair of the newly-established Sovereign Council, played a key role in the former regime's brutal counter-insurgency campaign. People in Darfur have expressed their outrage at al-Burhan's appointment, claiming that under his command, the Border Guards committed numerous killings and forced displacement of civilians.

The TMC's deputy head, General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as Hemedti, was a mid-level commander in the Border Guards before being promoted by al-Bashir in 2013 to become commander of the Rapid Support Forces, drawn mainly from the Janjaweed militia and accused of committing ethnically-targeted violence in Darfur, the Nuba Mountains and, more recently, grave human rights violations in Khartoum.

Since assuming power in April 2019, the TMC has released political prisoners across the country and has arrested a number of high-ranking officials within al-Bashir's former ruling party, though many fear that elite politicians remain in power behind the scenes.

**Yasir Arman, Deputy Chairman of SPLM-North (faction of Malik Agar) and Secretary of External Affairs for Sudan** Call, summed up these concerns when he told us: *"Our security is essential. Sudan could collapse at any time. Islamist fascists clearly have unfinished business. They long to return to power. Even in the last few days, security forces have been mobilising with smaller terrorist groups."*

*"But things are changing. It is important that commentators recognise and write about the defeat of Islamist fascism in Sudan. Last year, I was arrested and detained by the regime. But thanks to international pressure – including from the UK – I was rescued. There is a new pro-unity generation, who embrace diversity of religion, culture and race. Khartoum has been transformed by the people. Young people are determined to bring change. They make Sudan what it is, with our slogan: 'Freedom, Peace and Justice'. For the first time, there is an opportunity for democracy and peace."*

**Malik Agar, Chief of Defence for SPLM-North in the Blue Nile region, also expressed similar hopes and reservations:**

*“Things have changed very much. There is now a strong belief that we will reach peace – but with challenges. All sides now want peace, they just look at achieving it through different means. We have now signed the humanitarian cessation of hostilities as well as the humanitarian agreement. There is now a mission team and within one week, we can start the humanitarian mission in our controlled areas. We must make use of this opportunity. We believe that we will sign peace. The war we are fighting started back in 1955 and we have only had short gaps of peace since then. Our troubles go back to before independence.*



Caroline Cox with Malik Agar, Chief of Defence for SPLM-North in the Blue Nile region.

*“We must keep hope alive. We need support from the UK, not only throughout the peace process in Juba, but also after peace has been agreed. If we achieve legislative autonomy [in the Two Areas], we can begin to fix our problems. If there is no peace, things will stay the same. Peace is a prerequisite for development and prosperity. What next for refugees and IDPs? They want to go home but they need resources. How are they going to rebuild? Please help us to strengthen the transitional government, working with them to strengthen the national institutes of Sudan.”*

Local leaders urge the UK and its Troika partners (US and Norway) to maintain pressure on the country’s interim government and continue to demand a clear timeline for a sustainable transition to democracy – real change must occur.

### Healthcare and education

After 3 decades of civil war, access to healthcare and education in the Two Areas is extremely limited or non-existent. Preventable illnesses such as malaria, diarrhoea and coughing continue to pose life-threatening risks, mostly to pregnant women and children.

Access to reproductive health services and safe childbirth facilities remains extremely limited and women and girls continue to be exposed to unwanted pregnancy, teenage pregnancy, sexually-transmitted infections and the risk of maternal mortality.

The increase in returnees to the Two Areas (partly driven by events in Khartoum) is expected to put pressure on already over-stretched resources.

**Phillip Idris (below), Paramount Chief of Chali el Fil in Blue Nile, told us:**



“The war destroyed our lifestyle. Then the floods were not expected and people were forced up into the trees to take shelter. As a result this year, I believe we will have famine. After surviving the flooding, people were not strong enough to cultivate crops. We expect famine because of the flooding.”

**Samuel John (right), a village elder in Chali el Fil said:**

“Here in the liberated areas of Blue Nile, our greatest need is clean and safe drinking water. Currently we are drinking from stagnant ground water that the animals also use. This brings disease. The schools in the area have no books, no trained teachers, no blackboard, chalk or supplies. There is also no food at school so the children that do go to school often end up leaving halfway through to search for food.”





**Unan Saman (below), Secretary of Information for Blue Nile, said:**



“Basic needs, even clean water are not available in the liberated areas of Blue Nile. We do not have enough water pumps for the people. We do not have medicine. When people are sick, they have to walk for 12 hours to the Samaritan’s Purse hospital in Doro – walking that distance when they are ill. Otherwise, our people are resorting to using natural medicine and as a result people are dying. The biggest problem in these areas is illiteracy as there are no trained teachers. Children are just scattered all day playing in the bush as there is no school for them to go to.”

**Barnaba Neru, a health worker and local area administrator in Blue Nile, said:** *“In the last four years that I have been in this area, I have never seen any children receiving vaccinations.”*



Hana, Hayat and Jackie, local residents of Chali el Fil, Blue Nile State, Sudan.

**Hayat, a local resident of Chali el Fil, said:**

“We are awaiting famine this year when we will have only wild fruits and roots from the bush to eat. Our current harvest will only last us two months. I have eight children but two of them were killed during the war because of malaria. Liver disease also killed my husband so I am now a widow. I stayed here during the war and faced the suffering. Now, I go to the bush every day to collect wood to sell at the market in order to provide a livelihood for me and my six children. We need hospitals here and school materials. Sometimes three children share one exercise book.”

**Malik Agar also told us:** *“We have two illiterate generations in Sudan. How are we supposed to address this? Much needs to change. Children in camps will have to learn a different curriculum, when they return to Sudan. The availability of trained teachers is a huge issue that will go on for many years. Those fee that are trained now need to be retained which is difficult due to a lack of food and water. Training teachers and health workers will be the top priority in the post- peace era.”*

He added: *“International development organisations in the liberated areas of Blue Nile and the Nuba Mountains lack everything -- healthcare, clean water, education and food. There is a severe and urgent need for clean drinking water in Blue Nile right now. These liberated communities literally have nothing.”*



The HART team meeting with local residents and administrators in Chali el Fil, Sudan.

**If you wish to support communities like these in Blue Nile with urgent food and medical supplies, please donate via the website quoting ‘Blue Nile relief’.**



### **3. SOUTH SUDAN**

The civil war in South Sudan has resulted in thousands of civilian deaths and forced millions to flee their homes. According to the UN, 1.5 million are internally displaced. Over half the population is food insecure. Two thirds of the country requires humanitarian assistance.

We first visited **Maban**, in the furthest corner of northeast South Sudan, which is home to an estimated 150,000 refugees. The state's only hospital is located in this town, with only a few other primary healthcare centres nearby. Due to devastating floods in October 2019, hundreds of shelters were destroyed and refugees were unable to access food for two weeks.

We also visited **Hai Masna displacement camp in Wau, Bahr-El-Gazal** which is currently home to 10,511 IDPs. **Camp Secretary, Santino Kuol, discussed camp security:**

“Very few people are returning home due to the conflict. Security around Hai Masna is good but if people go far out to collect firewood then they must go in groups to help boost security as there are rebels hiding in the bush.”

We also sat down with several female IDPs to hear of their concerns in camp.



**Magdalena (left), mother of four, summarised her concerns:**

“Education is available in the camp and those who have money from small businesses can send their children to school. But I can't because I don't have any money to pay for my four children to go to school.

Magdalena outside her 'house' in Hai Masna displacement camp. In the rainy season, she takes her children to the local school for shelter – but there is not enough room for all of the IDPs.



“We don’t have light at night and there are many snakes and scorpions. Every week we hear of snake bites. My children complain a lot, telling me that we need to go home and asking me why they are in this place. They are confused why we have to live like this.

For us women, the most challenging issue here is accessing dignity pads.”

£5 can provide a feminine hygiene kit for one woman for 1 month. If you wish to support women like Magdalena and Ahok, please donate via the website quoting ‘Hai Masna’.

### **Visit to St. John’s Training College in Wau.**

HART continues to monitor the funds donated by Global Care to the College, operating under the supervision of longstanding HART partner, Archbishop Moses Deng Bol. We sat with current students to hear how the funded course has improved their English language skills, teaching confidence in the classroom and career projection.

(Right) Five students on the Teacher Training Course at St. John’s Training College in Wau, South Sudan.



## Meetings in Juba

### **President Salva Kiir**

Following the massacre, the HART team was privileged to meet with the President of South Sudan, Salva Kiir Mayardit, who (amongst many issues discussed) expressed his deep concern for the people of Abyei and his desire to see a humanitarian and political solution. **He said:**

“Al Bashir totally ignored the issue of Abyei’s political solution and this is why the issue has remained for so long. The UN will gloss over the massacre in Abyei. The UN are doing nothing and are a source of the problem themselves. I always blame the British Government for leaving us behind under the control of ruthless people who don’t trust us as humans. If the British Government doesn’t support us this year with food aid following the floods, it will be a disaster.”

### **The SPLA- IO (in Opposition) Deputy Spokesperson**

The team met **Colonel Lam Paul Gabriel, deputy spokesperson for SPLA-IO** (Sudan People’s Liberation Army - In Opposition), to hear about current developments, including the unification of South Sudan’s armies, in light of the peace agreement set to be signed on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2020:

“In two weeks, most of the two armies will merge to create a unified army of 40,000 troops. The war isn’t just between Dinka and Nuer, there are now many tribes involved. As military, we must remove the tribal conflict and unite for the sake of the country. Now in the training centre, we sing “we are all one! The ceasefire is really holding up well.”

“Disarmament will be a very big challenge, even the civilian population is more armed than the military and we can only disarm those who come to the military training centre. One issue is that we have armed border communities. If you disarm them then you have to disarm the border communities from Kenya, Uganda and Sudan. This will be a condition of civilian disarmament and will cause a delay.”

### **Yasir Arman, Deputy Chairman of the SPLM-N (Sudan People’s Liberation Movement-North)**

The team also met **Deputy Chairman of the SPLM-N, Yasir Aman** who discussed a new period of hope since the fall of former President al-Bashir in April 2019:

“At long last, the Sudanese people have the peace that they deserve after years of facing violence under President Bashir. Now there is a new generation that celebrates unity and diversity. This new generation is ready to build a new Sudan.

Freedom and justice are the slogan for the resolution. We still have a way to go to achieve democracy in Sudan and the primary objective must be reform of the security sector.”

### **Meeting in Abyei with Arop Dombek Deng, freed from slavery**

During the war from 1989-2005, the Government of Sudan undertook massive slave raids using Government soldiers, mujahedeen and murahaleen to abduct and enslave many thousands of women and slavery. In the 1990s, Caroline Cox worked with Christian Solidarity International to free approximately 2,000 slaves.

While in Abyei on this visit, a young man, **Arop Dombek Deng** approached Caroline Cox, asking if she was ‘Lady Cox’.

**He said:** *“You saved me. You saved my life. All the other children knew the name ‘Lady Cox’. It’s because of you I am here”.*

*“I was born in Koloa, north of Abyei, and later moved to Agok. We witnessed horrific assaults and continuous attacks, including raids and burnings. My brother was only ten when he joined the SPLA. My family and I were attacked by Arabs on the road to Abyei at 3am and held to ransom. They broke my father’s spears. They took my clothes and left me naked. I was 5 years old. After three days of walking, I arrived at a town where I was threatened by a man and beaten with a gun. He bought me as a slave for his sister. I lived with her for five years, taking care of livestock and helping with domestic chores. The man would beat me so much because I refused to say I was an Arab. Finally I said I was Arab and he threw away the whips. He later trained me in horse riding and how to fight and kill. I took part in a competition with other children, which I won, so I was absorbed into their militia. I was appointed as a leader. They tried to stop me from leaving because they were preparing for war. But Lady Cox negotiated my freedom. Thanks to her, I was free.”*



Caroline Cox and Arop Dombek, a former slave she helped to free during the 1990s.



### **Urgent recommendations**

1. **The massacre in Kolom:** Following the failure to protect the villagers of Kolom from the massacre, the UN must launch a full investigation, sharing immediately any findings with the entire community, otherwise there will be no confidence in its regional peacekeeping initiatives.
2. **Resolve Abyei's unresolved location issues:** We call on the international community to help to resolve the political issue over the geographic location of Abyei in Sudan or South Sudan.
3. **The urgent need for aid in Abyei, Blue Nile (Sudan) and South Sudan:** We call on the UK government to make representations to the interim government of Sudan to provide urgently needed food, health care and education ahead of a famine expected later in the year.
4. **Access to funds:** Many community leaders in Sudan and South Sudan are inhibited from accessing funds by large-scale donors – including the UK's Department for International Development – because of bureaucratic requirements. We urge donors to make funds available to those who undertake programmes which supply essential services, such as food, education, health care, agricultural development and small-scale entrepreneurship. There is an especially urgent need for resolution of Abyei's undecided location and to ensure that large-scale aid organisations have access to the region.
5. **End of Impunity:** It has been eleven years since (former) President al-Bashir was issued an arrest warrant by the International Criminal Court on multiple counts of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. His government was responsible for genocidal policies, including the deaths of three million people and the displacement of five million people in the self-proclaimed jihad from 1989-2005 and subsequent military offensives and violations of human rights in Darfur and the Two Areas (South Kordofan and Blue Nile States). It is imperative for the UK to make it clear that impunity is not an option.



Caroline Cox in church speaking with refugees in Doro Refugee Camp in Maban, South Sudan.



## **Acknowledgements**

At the core of HART's ethos is a commitment to working in partnership with local people. All of our projects are locally-led – from vision through to implementation – by partners who possess the requisite knowledge, skills and commitment to find and to deliver appropriate solutions.

HART wishes to thank everyone who made us welcome and who provided the help we needed to accomplish our visit, including the Rt Rev Moses Deng Bol, Anglican Bishop of the Diocese of Wau, Bishop Michael Deng Bol, the Bishop of Abyei and Benjamin Barnaba, Executive Director of the New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC).

We are always grateful to MAF (Mission Aviation Fellowship) for their professionalism, commitment and vocation, enabling us to reach places often otherwise inaccessible - and thereby to fulfil our mandate to work with local partners in locations often not reached by major aid organisations.

We also thank all who spoke to us, sharing information and concerns. We are particularly grateful for the grace and dignity with which we were received by people living in conditions of extreme suffering and depravation. We will try to be a voice for them and to make known their needs – and the need for the international community to fulfil its obligations 'to provide and to protect'.



The HART team with Sudanese partner, Benjamin Baranaba (Executive Director of the New Sudan Council of Churches) upon arrival with MAF at Agok, Abyei.