CDA

REFLECTING ON PEACE PRACTICE PROJECT:

Case Study

"When Truth is Denied, Peace Will Not Come": The People-to-People Peace Process of the New Sudan Council of Churches

Hadley Jenner

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I. HISTORY AND CONTEXT

A. Identity

1) Three Indications

Several years ago in Khartoum, I was privileged to view a display of art by various Sudanese artists, all Arab Muslims from the north. The work was very detailed, in vigorous brush strokes with a profusion of strong symbolic statements. I was particularly struck by the presence of a reoccurring symbol in several different paintings of graceful, elongated cow's horns which also served as a crescent moon. The crescent moon I knew was a universal symbol of Islam. What was not quite clear was what this moon had to do with the cow's horns. I inquired about this from Abusharia, one of the artists exhibiting the paintings, who spoke of the cow's horns symbolizing the people of the south. The Sudan then, as now, was under the government of the National Islamic Front (now renamed the National Congress). This regime was then and still is committed to a forced policy of Islamization and Arabization of the south that is largely Christian and African Religion. In effect, the government's policy is a statement that there shall be one identity for Sudan. The artists, however, were making a very discreet comment about this forced policy. The painting seemed to speak about a Sudan searching for its identity, in turmoil with itself.

Among the Dinka, particularly the Dinka Bor, Christian conversions have accelerated through the efforts of indigenous evangelists coinciding with massive cultural trauma given the loss of cattle, destruction of homes and the forced removal of mass numbers of people as internally displaced. In this environment of extreme deprivation and dislocation, the Dinka are making connections to themselves and the Israelites brought out of slavery by God's leading (Nikkel, 1993). A key biblical text is Isaiah 18, the prophecy against New Kush that the Dinka see as identifying themselves (see Appendix 1). In this and other passages, the Dinka see themselves as included in God's word, described, placed and identified. The Dinka (and particularly other Nilotes of the "land the rivers divide") have powerfully augmented their identity through this linkage between themselves and the Israelites of the Hebrew Bible stretching over some three millennia. This identification is energizing and gives them hope for a future restored, the land reclaimed and a community liberated. Moreover, it is also a testament to the profundity of this ongoing civil war.

The above two indications of identity come from the north and the south. In that part of Sudan on the edge of both south and north one has the very interesting and entwined story of the Ngok Dinka and the Humr Baggara Arabs. While these peoples have had a history of relatively peaceful co-existence, a great deal of insecurity and tension developed in the post-independence period leading to the present imposition of an Arab-Islam hegemony over a more pluralist past. A noted poet and singer, Minyiel Row, spoke of how the evildoers are considered virtuous and those virtuous the evildoers, by recounting an old folktale about a hyena and a fox. Another poem (see Appendix 2) speaks to the power struggles in this bordering region which have added to the conflict

and confusion (Deng, 1995). The theme is one of the outside manipulations of local leaders resulting in the victimization of both Dinka and Arab.

2) *Sudanese Contrast of Identities*

A leading Sudanese scholar, in almost encyclopedic detail, confirms the importance of identity in the above examples. This scholar describes the conflict in Sudan as centered in contending visions of identity. The north is seen as "assimilationist" given the ideology of legitimacy through Arab genealogy, whether real or imagined. This ideology is tied to a dominant religion, Islam, which is further expressed through dominant families now in alliance, now at odds, all contending to maintain control of the state. The northern Arab-Islam self-perception seeks to extend control of the state through assimilation where it can or by force where it cannot. This self-perception, however, is many-layered. The northerner while speaking to itself of a racial (Arab) purity denies its own biological connection to African origins and acts with varying degrees of prejudice toward southerners. Francis M. Deng writes (1995):

> But since certain African racial and cultural elements are still visible in the assimilated Sudanese Arabs, it does not require a professional social psychologist to resume that such a disdain for elements visible in one's own physiognomy must at some degree of consciousness be a source of tension and disorientation. Indeed, the northern Sudanese tendency to exaggerate Arabism and Islam and to look down on the negroid races as slaves could well be the result of a deep-seated inferiority complex, or, to put it in reverse, a superiority complex as a compensational device for their obvious marginality as Arabs.

Paired with this northern identity of assimilation is the southern identity of "resistance," to impositions from the outside, be it in the form of Ottoman, Mahdist, Anglo-Egyptian or a post-independence northern Arab "colonialism." Particularly, the Nilotic peoples in the south have traditionally viewed themselves as superior, having been bestowed by the Creator with cattle from creation. Yet, over the past century and a half this self-perception has been under assault. A Dinka song collected by F. M. Deng (1995) begins:

> Our land is closed in a prison cell
> The Arabs have spoiled our land

Currently, the SPLM/A offers a clear alternative in its reassertion of resistance to the "prison cell" and to those who have "spoiled our land." Nevertheless, the ability of outside power structures to discriminate, control resources and cause disruption and confusion is as F. M Deng observes (1995) "profoundly disorienting for a people who had assumed superiority as God's chosen people." Deng (1995) continues:

> These self-perceptions have a long and contentious history and carry with
> it the peculiarities of identity at odds with the "facts" (as with the north)
> and the hostility of an identity created in large measure by a resistance (as

with the south). These contending identities frame the efforts of the New Sudan Council of Churches in working toward a lasting peace.

B. Some History and the Conflict Context

Sudan, the largest country in Africa,[1] is a major crossroads territory. Most simply, it borders nine other African states (circling from the north with Egypt, to the east with Eritrea and Ethiopia, on the south with Kenya, Uganda, Congo, and Central African Republic and then on the west with Chad and Libya). More importantly, Sudan borders the Red Sea and the Arabian Peninsula to the east, while southern Sudan occupies the eastern end of the African Sahel, a long belt of savannah fringing the Sahara desert. Sudan straddles both the very arid desert in the north and the semi-arid lands to the south. In a north-south direction, the two main forks of the Nile flow into southern Sudan, the Blue Nile from Ethiopia and the White Nile from Uganda, to join at Khartoum, flowing on into Egypt. The agricultural significance of these flows, floods and anticipated alluvial deposits has been chronicled for millennia. These physical features have long linked peoples in the north and south through trade and commerce as well as resource exploitation and slavery. Moreover, from the east, various Arab groups have entered the Sudan at different times and from the west, traders and those on their haj to Mecca in the east have entered Sudan frequently along trade routes through the savannah. With these movements and history, conflict is a frequent companion. See Appendix 4 for a chronology of historical events and current activities.

While the history of Sudan is ancient, particularly highlighted by the Nubian Kingdom over 2000 years ago, most "modern" Sudanese history begins with the Turco-Egyptian period, 1820–1881. In the last century of the Ottoman Empire, the ambitious viceroy of Egypt, Muhammad Ali Pasha, sought to extend his control of territory and more importantly the exploitation of people and resources by an invasion of Sudan, begun in 1820 (Holt, 1961).

The eventual response to this extension of the Ottoman Empire was the birth of what many now regard as the beginning of Sudanese nationality – the Mahdist Revolution followed by the short-lived reign of the Khalifa 'Ali ibn Muhammad Hilu. Muhammad Ahmad ibn 'Abdallah, claimed to be more than simply a "mahdi," God's instrument to overthrow alien rulers and inaugurate a new Islamic theocratic government. He took on three titles[2] meant to convey that through his action at the end of time, the community of believers would be reunited as originally expected by the Prophet. Though the Mahdi died in 1885, through his charismatic action, people were galvanized into a revolution in 1881 leading to the Mahdist state which lasted until overthrown by the colonial authorities led by Britain in 1898 (Holt, 1961; Deng, 1995).

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[1] Sudan is more than twice the size of Alaska. If superimposed on the United States east of the Mississippi River, most of the country in that region would be covered.
[2] The three titles were: the Imam, the Successor of the Apostle of God and the Expected Mahdi.

The colonial authority was officially known as the "Anglo-Egyptian Condominium," jointly administered by Egypt and Britain but dominated by the latter from 1899 to 1955. From the earliest days of this colonial rule until shortly before independence, January 1, 1956, two very different Sudans were fostered. The maintenance of law and order was paramount but the north, largely Arab and Muslim, received the major benefit of investment in social, economic and political development. The south, largely African Religion and comprised of a variety of ethnic groups was opened to Christian missionaries introducing education and Western ideas regarding civilization and culture. Otherwise, the south was largely ignored and removed from any effort of national unity and development. The option that the south may at some later point join British East Africa was left open (Holt, 1961; Deng, 1995).

In 1947 Britain abandoned the two separate development policies and moved quickly to divest itself of control in Sudan. Little concern was evident in constitutional guarantees for protection of the south. As a result, decisions were made by the north concerning political organization and control of resources (e.g. oil production) without the participation of southern leaders. Thus, from the southern perspective of resistance to imposed authority, the stage was now set for a continuation of the northern domination from the last century, be it Turco-Egyptian or Mahdist. The contending visions of identity, the assimilationist north and southern resistance, had not been adequately resolved and were ripe for conflict. Thus, even before independence, the first phase of the civil war began in 1955 (Deng, 1995). Seventeen years later, the violent first phase of this civil war ended with the mediation of the World Council of Churches and the All African Council of Churches (the Addis Ababa Agreement of 1972). People now in retrospect see this first "agreement" as but a temporary lull (i.e. eleven years in most places, although localized fighting did occur throughout this period) in an ongoing conflict (Medley, 1999).

In 1983, the civil war was reignited by the Government of Sudan's abrogation of the Addis Ababa accords and redivision of the political boundaries for southern lands. The original Manifesto of the Sudan Peoples Liberation Army makes clear what lay behind the mobilization of southern armed troops. Two major themes, political control and control of natural resource wealth can be abstracted from this Manifesto. The 1972 agreement had provided for certain boundaries and political administration. The redivision of these boundaries to benefit the north was the biggest and clearest violation of the agreement. The issue of resource development and who has control or even a say in this process was also a key igniting factor in the renewed fighting. Construction of the Jonglei Canal, an enormous construction project meant to speed the delivery of Nile water through the marshes of the Sudd for use in the north, is specifically identified in the Manifesto as a cause to arms. This project was seen in the south as destructive to the dry season grazing reserves of Nilotic pastoralists and as another imposition from the north in which they had no say. Moreover, the north's attempts to redraw borders to include oil, uranium, nickel and rich agricultural lands were seen as the modern continuation of northern trends to exploit the people and lands of the south.

While many believe that the unilateral imposition of Islamic law (sharia) was the triggering event in the continuation of the civil war, it was not until later in 1983, after the formation of the Sudan Peoples Liberation Army, that this occurred. Nevertheless, many southerners joined the armed troops as a result of this development on sharia (Medley, 1999; Medley, 2000).

More specific to the immediate setting for the People-to-People peace process, were the internal divisions within the SPLA of 1991 and subsequent defections of top SPLA commanders within the year. Riek Machar, accompanied by Gordon Kong, and Lam Akol, James Igga and others resented the perceived Dinka domination in the SPLA. An underlying ethnic tension, born of a history of grazing and cattle disputes, had always been a factor in bringing different ethnic groups under the unified command structure for a military force. Claiming to the outside world a need for democratization of the movement, the defections were characterized as a means to political pluralism, democracy and human rights. More truthfully, ethnic resentments were getting mixed with political moves augmented by automatic weapons. The result was "interfactional fighting" as Nuer and Dinka, the two largest ethnic communities, attacked each other, retaliated and repeated yet again following these upper-level political-military moves (Medley, 2000).[3] One should understand that the church can and often does follow these same ethnic boundaries. This has been a continuing obstacle, particularly for the NSCC as it seeks to speak as the voice of the Christian Church in southern Sudan (New Sudan Council of Churches, 1998; Miller, 2000).

Some figures speak to the cost involved in this conflict. In 1983, some 6–7.5 million southern Sudanese were present at the start of renewed hostility. In 2000, some 3-4 million remain (Medley, 1999; Reimer, 2000). Since 1983, more than 1.5 million people have died (Lowrey, 1998). Moreover, since that time, more than 4.3 million Sudanese have been forced to flee their homes due to the fighting. In the context of the world population of refugees and displaced persons, about one out of eight of them is Sudanese (Verney, 1999). Moreover, according to some observers, some 90% of the internally displaced persons results directly from the interfactional fighting that has characterized the civil war this past decade (Deng, 2000; Riak, A., 2000). Today, nearly 75% of the Dinka from Bor District in Upper Nile Province live outside the territory of their home (Sudan Focal Point Europe, 1999). Finally, the impact upon people is greatest at a local level. For most southern Sudanese, there are no teachers, health workers, buses or even markets. There is no money to pay for these structures and services unless it is provided by donors, a host of helping organizations and the churches. The infrastructure and fabric of a civil society are virtually non-existent. Two teachers in Yambio of Western Equatoria, far to the south, told me of their students who walk one way for 35 days to attend boarding school and then return by foot when school is not in session because schooling is so prized and virtually non-existent (Miller and Samatar, 2000).

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[3] For a comprehensive and even-handed treatment of the many interrelated dimensions of the Sudanese civil war and their political, social and economic impact, please refer to The Churches' Reference Book for Peace in Sudan (Draft), 1999, by Michael Medley.

I spoke with several southern Sudanese pastors, but two left a very strong impression and a series of quotes which help the outsider to understand the present conflict and what the People-to-People peace process has introduced from their point of view. The Rt. Rev. Nathaniel Garang of the Episcopal Church of Sudan was the co-founder of the New Sudan Council of Churches and at an earlier age a combatant for the south in the earlier phase of the civil war, 1955-1972. The Rev. John Okumu is the current chairman of the NSCC Executive Committee and from Eastern Equatoria. These pastors believe that the time has now arrived revealing the root cause of the long-running conflict. According to them, "the Arabs divide and then conquer." But now, "the period of manipulation has ended." A manipulation foisted directly upon the south by the north in "dividing people to finish them." Thus, the interfactional fighting between the Dinka and Nuer groups as well as the government of Sudan-sponsored militias and various armed factions is exposed for what it is. By achieving "peace and unity among ourselves we liberate ourselves." They continue, "When truth is denied, peace will not come" (Okumu and Garang, 2000). A rising sense of optimism and positive energy is apparent in listening to these pastors as they speak of the immediate future in light of the peace process despite the enormity of losses suffered. The positive energy of this optimism and faith framed and informed by the biblical texts from Isaiah and Exodus has been the subject of several songs composed by southern Sudanese (see Appendix 3 for an example).

Other general observations about the nature of the conflict are expressed. Some observers regard the conflict as one of "abused hospitality." As a pot of food would be shared with a guest (i.e. the northerner), hospitality was extended (i.e. the sharing of resources), but now the guest is "eating all the food and wanting to take the pot away as well!" (Deng, 2000). Moreover, the conflict is deeply about imposition, be it religion, ideology or leadership. The joint statement of the two Sudanese Council of Churches maintains that the Sudanese conflict is about communal conflicts, value conflicts and interestingly, data conflicts. Communal, "involving ethnicity and race, in which power elites who come predominantly from one ethnic group consider themselves superior to other ethnic groups." Concern with value because "Political elites invoke Islam to justify or perpetuate their grip on power and material resources." And data conflicts because facts are distorted to serve "political elites and technocrats" (e.g. the Government of Sudan refuses to update the national census last taken in 1956) (Sudan Council of Churches and New Sudan Council of Churches, 1999).

C. African Cosmology and Its Significance for the People-to-People Peace Process

At the risk of an over-broad, sweeping generalization, the challenge of reclaiming an authentic African present and future rests with an understanding and application of African cosmology. Whether one's interest is in sustainable development, the details of trade and the relationship of Africa to the global economy, or whether one's interest is the environment, or finally an interest in conflict and peacebuilding, the covenantal African focus on life, harmony, right relationships between people, land and the Supreme, Creator God is fundamental. All things are included here and begin from this point. Many

departures from this point are possible, many responsible for great deprivation and misery. Other departures, such as the People-to-People peace process provide a source of great hope and have much to teach us.

African cosmology is the banner I use to speak of the continental worldview which defines a people's understanding of their spiritual universe and gives shape to their myths, rituals, social behavior and history. A cosmology situates a people within their environment in time and weaves a series of relationships among them, with their God and between other peoples. A people's cosmology is the essence of their identity. Its nurture sustains life. In the absence of customary terms and agreed on language, I am emphatically noting the significance of this reality to the peace process now underway in southern Sudan. Various references to "tradition" or "custom" or "African religion" or even "culture" are all tied. The purpose here is not to analytically separate these terms but to call attention to this fuzzy, inclusive and quite profound reality at work today in Africa (Downing et al, 1999).

This message, variously expressed, is being said throughout Africa with increasing vigor by theologians in the church, various groups, and thoughtful youth and emerging political leaders (Bediako, 1995; Magessa, 1997). Even many thoroughly schooled and leaders in various ecumenical circles stress the importance of finding and reclaiming an authentic African way of working through various problems. The truth must be told. Values hidden by "modern ways" because of shame in understanding them as evil are giving way to a renewed sense that Africa has much to learn from itself, from the traditions that have been rejected or are being put aside (Kinoti, 2000). A reclamation of African cosmology may yet hold a sense of hope in constructing a better Africa (Downing, et al, 1999).

Of course in some areas like southern Sudan, these values are still held and powerfully spoken from traditional leaders, both men and women. The Wunlit Dinka-Nuer Covenant, one aspect of the People-to-People peace process, was a recent profound reminder of the significance of African cosmology and its relationship to the civil war in Sudan.

When the early missionaries came to the Dinka in the early part of this century, the first response of the Dinka was that there was nothing new in what they had to say about spiritual matters (Ruun and Deng, 2000)! The early missionaries in fact often regarded the Nilotic peoples (i.e. Dinka, Nuer, Shilluk, Anuak, Murle) as particularly difficult and troublesome. The anthropologists regarded them quite differently. An early account described the Dinka as the most religious group this husband/wife team of anthropologists knew (Seligman and Seligman, 1932). Ordinary life is comprised of blessing, song and story which as necessary will call for sacrificial offerings to God out of thanksgiving for the gift given, be it good crops, favorite livestock, or important events between people which will be marked by covenantal sacrifice (Duany, 1992).

To illustrate the significance of this cosmology and how it is directly relevant to an understanding of the many-layered conflict in Sudan, one may consider where leaders come from. Among the Nilotic ethnic family, leaders have traditionally come from

families known for their good reputation over several generations. These leaders are people who had been warriors of distinction, those known to be generous, able to resolve conflicts and be advised by elders. This was sung about, narrated, and remembered spanning generations. One did not remove oneself from this milieu and declare his leadership, it came from within.

The following anecdote is a particularly poignant metaphor for a traditional rebuke of current leadership. In 1997, the SPLA made a series of military advances that greatly enlarged the territory under their control. Upon entering the recaptured town of Rumbek in southern Sudan, John Garang, Commander-in-Chief of the SPLA, summoned various chiefs and leaders to a meeting to announce his victory. One elder rose and commented in a respectful manner to "Chief" Garang that he was "dancing alone." Reportedly, John Garang did not understand the elder's comment and went on to other matters (Deng, 2000). It is in this manner that African cosmology is so easily missed and viewed as almost irrelevant to the realities of modern Africa, like getting on with the business of liberating southern Sudan! But the elder was poetically referring to the fact that Garang's age-mates were not with him in his triumph, as one would expect if Dinka tradition were honored. He was in fact surrounded by soldiers much younger than he was. There was the implication that his leadership was not genuine in the manner of his actions and company. And from this implication, the gentle reminder that those who had first received formal schooling outside Dinka tradition, such as Garang, were now returning and imposing their leadership outside of traditional norms. [4]

This anecdote on leadership illustrates the deep-seated cleavages present in southern Sudan. There are several "faces" that convey these fissures to a variety of audiences. The various leaders of forces opposing the Government of Sudan play to the world, whether gaining support, arms and ideology from Ethiopia at an earlier time or whether it be from other African countries and the United States at a later time (Medley, 2000). The mission is sustaining the conflict and creating the impression of legitimacy. The conflict is in a very real sense the only "industry" available apart from that offered by the non-governmental organizations and thus a great deal of energy is expended to make this conflict palatable in a variety of different expressions. These expressions vary depending on the audience addressed, whether to the recruits, to neighboring countries and to a wider world concerned with an array of issues from human rights, oil resources, arms sales, political influence and development, to name a very few (Miller, 2000).

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[4] In another illustration of the leadership issue, it is recalled among the Nuer that Riek Machar's great-grandfather in the latter half of the 19th century, a chief named Teny, had been summoned along with many other Nuer chiefs by the great Nuer prophet, Nguondeng, to all come to a meeting and to bring a prize bull as a sacrifice. Upon arriving at the meeting, Teny told Nguondeng that he had brought a fine bull like all the rest. Without seeing this directly, Nguondeng nevertheless reportedly laughed in amazement at Teny's claim and proceeded to tell him that he was deceiving everyone with such a claim. As the story goes, the truth was that Nguondeng was right, Teny had brought no bull and was immediately given the name "dhurgon," a small animal like a jackal thought to be particularly deceitful. This name attaches to Riek Machar generations later, and serves as a traditional rebuke to a family in which deception is seen as still evident.

In a somewhat different arena, apart from commanding the military strategy are the politicians also looking to foster their standing and legitimacy as the "New Sudan" emerges. Various programs and ethnic backing are sought. At a different level entirely are the people and chiefs at the grassroots whose voice has finally begun to be heard without the noise and distortion that the higher realm of leaders and politicians has imposed. This is why many regard the People-to-People peace process as the "biggest hope," or "the best thing going" for working through the many-layered conflicts in southern Sudan (Peter, 2000; Reimer, 2000). For the first time, whether by design or intuitively, an effort in cleansing and redemption is underway, to reclaim the power of African cosmology and to remind ourselves, among other things, that "Nhialic[5] does not want us to kill each other."

II. NEW SUDAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

A. The Importance of Church in Southern Sudan

The development of the Christian church in Sudan stretches back more than 1500 years to the days of the early church. In northern Sudan, the Coptic Church became an important symbol of Sudanese identity for nearly 1000 years until overwhelmed by the dominance of Islam in the 15th century. Nevertheless, in the Sudan Council of Churches, the Coptic Church remains the oldest member church together with the much more recent missionary-induced churches.

In the south, Christianity has had a much shorter but intense history associated with missionary activity of the colonial and early independence period intertwined with a movement of growing Islamization and what has been seen by many southerners as a northern Sudanese imposed "colonial" rule. In 1964 foreign missionaries were expelled from Sudan. The civil war began to escalate in the 1960s and the church became increasingly seen as an institution offering both spiritual and material aid to those in the midst of massive upheaval. More lately, the church has been joined by non-governmental organizations as the dominant local and regional social-economic institution. But particularly the church embraces levels of spiritual ministry, political support, economic force, human development agency and partner with the military forces for the "liberation of southern Sudan," as most southern Sudanese would view it. Conversions to Christianity have occurred at an increasing rate with a fervor and evangelical spirit that has become intertwined with the southern Sudanese identity of resistance and embrace of liberation in the on-going civil war (Nikkel, 1993; Okumu and Garang, 2000; Mabaan, 2000).

Occasioned by the war, forced displacement, famine and low levels of economic development, the church plays a key intermediary role in all phases of life in southern Sudan today. It is in this intermediary role between African cosmology, the operative but almost unheard from essence, and the outside world which is the context for the People-to-People peace process.

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[5] "Nhialic," is the Dinka and Nuer word for the Supreme Creator Divinity from above.

B. Organization

The New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC) was initiated in 1989 in Torit, Eastern Equatoria, by Rt. Rev. Nathaniel Garang of the Episcopal Church of Sudan (ECS) and Bishop Paride Taban of the Diocese of Torit, Roman Catholic Church (RCC). Given the civil war and the inability of the Sudan Council of Churches to effectively serve churches not in government-controlled areas, increasing weight was given to a reconstituted Council of Churches for Sudanese in the SPLA held territories. This new council, the New Sudan Council of Churches, also follows the same pattern in the north of full membership and participation by the Catholics allowing for a unified stance for all churches in the South and an uncommon ecumenical vehicle for conversation to the outside world. Other member churches of NSCC are the Presbyterian Church of Sudan (PCOS), the Africa Inland Church (AIC) and the Sudan Interior Church (SIC).

In 1990, due to the escalating civil war in the area, the NSCC relocated to Nairobi and begin to adopt a major focus on peace and reconciliation leading to the People-to-People peace process. The People-to-People Peace Process (PtP) was started in 1997, following the affirmation made at the NSCC – SPLM/SPLA Dialogue at Yei regarding the role of the churches in bringing about peace. The PtP facilitator is Telar Deng, who reports directly to Dr. Haruun L. Ruun, the Executive Secretary. Moreover, NSCC has a strong Ecumenical Support Program and a Capacity Building Program providing training in a variety of topics for churches as needed and a dispersed system of nine centers throughout southern Sudan, including southern Blue Nile Province and in the Nuba Mountains of southern Kordofan. While these programs are not directly linked to the Peace Desk, they are another component to the peace story given their involvement in forging relationships and bringing people together (Otieno and Minalla, 2000).

The NSCC is under the leadership of Dr. Haruun Ruun who is in his second term as Executive Secretary. Structurally, the Council Executive Committee includes representatives from each of the five churches (ECS, RCC, PCOS, AIC and SIC), all with equal votes. Currently, Rev. John Okumu of AIC is Chairman of the Executive Committee with Rev. Stephen Ter of PCOS as Vice Chairman. The ecumenical movement in the Christian world has always been a mainstay of both Sudanese Councils of Churches and provides the majority of its funds from a diverse set of largely European and North American funders. Accompanying NSCC has been a core group of church-related organizations. Currently, this core group is chaired by Dr. Peter Bissem of the National Council of Churches of Kenya. The other organizations comprising this core group consist of the Sudan Catholic Bishop's office, Norwegian Church Aid, DanChurch Aid, Christian Aid, Mennonite Central Committee and the All African Council of Churches. A Sudan Advocacy Resource Group is yet another group, church-related organizations only, convened every month, to exchange views amongst the members on peace and advocacy issues for Sudan. Finally, from time to time as needs arise, a small select group of friends and organizations, known as the "think tank," are called upon by the Executive Secretary to brainstorm and assist with advice (Phillippo, 2000). See Appendix 5 for a chart depicting this structure and relationships.

III.   PEACE INITIATIVES RELATED TO THE CIVIL WAR IN SUDAN

A.   Previous Church-Related Initiatives

1)The Addis Ababa Peace Agreement of 1972

One of the most striking church-related initiatives was among the first, the church-mediated agreement that brought an end to the first seventeen years of the civil war. This agreement, finalized in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, introduced the ideas of regional autonomy, referendum for border areas and a sharing of resource wealth. As with the later NSCC People-to-People peace process, the ecumenical support for this effort in 1972 was substantial, involving the World Council of Churches as well as the All African Council of Churches. Moreover, the role of Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia was also instrumental, given the good relations that the Government of Sudan enjoyed then with Ethiopia and the personal assurances for the protection and security of the south given by the Emperor to the southern armed forces. Four factors ended the possibility for a redefined Sudan with a truly national outlook. These factors were: the overthrow of the Ethiopian government by Mengistu the following year, the subsequent steady erosion of the spirit of the agreement leading to the abrogation of the agreement and the redivision of administrative boundaries by the north in 1983 (Deng, 1995; Medley, 1999).[6]

2)   "Interpositioning"

The early years of the New Sudan Council of Churches were fraught with administrative difficulties, division among the churches and a degree of perceived interference in efforts to organize ecumenically[7]. In response, partner agencies supplied funds, advice and personnel in many cases. From 1990 to 1995, Roger Schrock, Church of the Brethren in the United States, was Executive Secretary. One of the early NSCC ideas for bringing peace was the promotion of "interpositioning," an idea brought by Schrock from his experience in Central America with Witness for Peace. With interpositioning, outside volunteers were placed on the lines between communities and hostile forces to be a "tripwire" and voice to the outside world. In such a way it was hoped that the conflict could receive more attention, ultimately to be resolved at higher levels. Two workshops were held by NSCC to provide training to some candidate volunteers, but nothing ever carried forward from this (Medley, 2000).

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[6] For more information, the reader is referred to Hizkias Assefa, 1987, <u>Mediation of Civil Wars:
Approaches and Strategies – the Sudan Conflict</u>, Westview Press, Boulder, CO.
[7] ACROSS, an evangelical, church-based NGO was seen by some almost as a competitor of NSCC in the early years. The loyalty of certain church leaders to ACROSS was seen as undermining the efforts of NSCC to develop a church voice for southern Sudan (Medley, 2000).

3) Peace Scouts, Diocese of Torit

An idea carried out by the Roman Catholic Church in the Diocese of Torit in the early 1990s under the leadership of Paride Taban was the "peace scout" initiative. Through a European donor, distinctive green hats and patches to be sewn onto shirts were distributed for youth designated as "peace scouts." These "peace scouts" were then sent out in twos to walk about Eastern Equatoria, seeking out difficulties, mediating where possible and reporting back on conflicts which they could not handle.

Both the "interpositioning" and "peace scouts" ideas were received largely as outside themes, without being culturally contextualized and playing to outside audiences. Because of that, they did not persist. Some observers (Ruun, 2000; Miller, 2000) feel strongly that the peace ideas that work originate from within the cultural context and are deeply owned given their compatibility with African cosmology (e.g. the People-to-People process).

4) PCOS Akobo peace gathering, 1994

In a manner foreshadowing the role of NSCC later in the People-to-People peace process, the Presbyterian Church of Sudan (PCOS) in 1994 facilitated a process aimed at bringing peace among the Jikany and Lou clans of Nuer. What started as a fishing dispute soon erupted in violence that then escalated to a level of conflict never before witnessed by the Nuer in 1993-1994. Over 1300 people were killed, over 77,000 cattle stolen, some 3000 homes burned and approximately 150,000 people displaced during that time period. Moreover, what made this conflict so uniquely devastating was its impact on the social structure. The destruction and chaos had compromised the ability of traditional institutions to bring order, restitution and healing (Lowrey, 2000; Lowrey, 1996).

In July 1994, the PCOS leaders called for a meeting held over several days involving some 2000 people, including all clans of the Nuer plus invited representatives from all adjacent ethnic communities such as the Dinka, Anuak, Shilluk, Murle and others (Rev. Deang, 2000; Rev. Terr and Rev. Madol, 2000). What distinguished this gathering was that the primary antagonists, the Jikany and Lou clans of the Nuer, were *not* the decision-makers in resolving this conflict. Several small groups comprised of other Nuer clans and the representatives from the surrounding communities became the decision-makers through consensus. Given the virtual non-functioning aspect of traditional Nuer authority, the fact that Nuer neighbors had to come and sort through the difficulty for the Nuer themselves was experienced as deeply shaming to the Nuer. Despite the shame involved, one observer believes that the Akobo agreement, at least among the Nuer, was very successful and remains as the standard, the "spirit of Akobo," to which other peace agreements are to be measured (Lowrey, 2000).

Yet other observers believe the Akobo meetings failed because the politicians were the ones actually in control and internal problems with the process led to no lasting resolution (Ruun and Deng, 2000). Riek Machar, as leader of the UDSF armed rebel faction, was very central to the Akobo process, being the force for bringing in PCOS (Lowrey, 2000).

Moreover, at a later stage the Jikany and Lou Nuer clans fought against each other despite the "spirit of Akobo." Nevertheless, this gathering is clearly a forerunner, despite its flaws, to the later NSCC People-to-People peace process, given the attempted reliance on traditional forms of working through conflict, the involvement of both the church and traditional leaders and the participation of over 2000 local people.

5) Church-facilitated meetings on war in Sudan

A series of meetings with the leadership of the various armed factions shortly after the 1991 split in the ranks of the SPLA were organized out of church concern for the suffering of the people in the south. The operative belief was that unity of leadership among the south was linked to more positive outcomes in peace talks between the Government of Sudan and the SPLA. These talks took place in Nairobi, 1991-1992, between the Garang and Machar factions and were set in the context of the Abuja, Nigeria, talks between SPLA and Sudan occurring at the same time. The church sat in on those latter talks as observers. The Nairobi meetings were inconclusive and the Abuja talks also collapsed (Medley, 2000; Wachira, 2000; Reimer, 2000).

B. Non Church-Related Initiatives

1) IGAD

The Inter-Governmental Authority on Development is a regional grouping of those states in the Horn of Africa brought together originally to assess matters of desertification and development and to promote regional strategies of addressing these problems. The member states include Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya, and Uganda. Matters of conflict and peacebuilding have become increasingly important though, and in 1994, special attention was given to peace talks involving the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Army. This remains the only formal place for working on the peace talks with the leadership of both the north and at least the SPLA in the south. Within the last year, a special secretariat and envoy for these talks has been authorized, indicative of the significance the civil war in Sudan holds for the region (Miller, 2000). Standing in support of this effort is the IGAD Partner's Forum, comprising those donor countries to IGAD who may have an interest in the outcome of the peace talks.

Beginning in 1994, the IGAD peace process on Sudan has moved slowly forward, foundered, moved back again or been invigorated by parties when the military campaigns have soured. Nevertheless, an early and significant advance was the apparent agreement on the Declaration of Principles which highlights the importance of a secular, democratic state in Sudan with self-determination foreclosing no option. In the stop and start manner characterizing this process, these Principles remain as the basis for negotiation (Medley, 1999; Medley, 2000).

The IGAD peace process has been criticized by some as too narrow (the contending parties are the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Army – no other

groups or parties are represented in the talks), distant, "not transparent," and not involving civil society by some observers (Peter, 2000; LoWilla, 2000). As a result, some groups with close links to IGAD donors and the Partner's Forum have successfully pushed for representation on the various committees now formed in parallel to the peace process. Moreover, the NSCC, in an effort to broaden the linkages, is also now requesting for the Sudanese churches to join the IGAD peace process as observers (Ruun, 2000). Yet it is recognized that the SPLA is too narrow a link to IGAD, that the south needs to put "their house in order first," and that the IGAD peace process would be enhanced by the People-to-People initiative (Deng, 2000).

Others observe that the IGAD mandate does not extend to a variety of NGOs and religious organizations joining the process. "Where is the line to be drawn separating those included from those excluded," they ask. "The key is dialogue – no problem in being there, meeting others, raising issues, talking, etc." Linkage at all levels is clearly needed but there are many creative ways of providing that linkage that do not strain the mandates (Kiplagat, 2000).

2) Peace from Within

By 1996 the factional split engineered by Riek Machar and others had not achieved its goal of an independent Southern Sudan nor had it done much to improve the openness of the political process within the SPLA. Some observers believe the motive of Machar in approaching the Government of Sudan for a peace settlement was related more to his own political survival than in any lofty goal of bringing peace to a war-ravaged country. Pushing him in this direction was the denial for his organization, the United Democratic Salvation Front (UDSF), of a seat at the IGAD talks. The Khartoum government welcomed this overture and crafted an agreement with his forces resulting in arms, support and a residence in Khartoum for Machar (Medley, 2000).

When the SPLA, aided most probably by Uganda, staged a series of large military advances early in 1997, regaining lost territory and capturing new ground, the effort of broadening what the Khartoum government referred to as the "Peace from Within" process took on new urgency. Accordingly, in April 1997, an agreement recognizing the right of self-determination for the people of the south and stating that both "sharia and custom shall be the sources of legislation" was drafted. Some prominent politicians signed this and three other military forces (the Sudan People's Liberation Movement – United, South Sudan Independent Group, and the Equatoria Defense Force) in addition to UDSF (The Sudan Peace Agreement, 1997; Medley, 2000). In response to the formation of the South Sudan Liberation Movement and the creation of an Upper Nile Provisional Military Command Council in late 1999, Riek Machar has left Khartoum and formed the Sudan People's Democratic Front. Citing the "collapse of the April 21st 1997 Sudan peace agreement," which some observers tie directly to disputes over distribution of the oil wealth, this government-aided peace process seems at an end (Verney, 1999; Sudan People's Democratic Front, 2000; South Sudan Liberation Movement, 2000; Medley, 2000).

3)   Engendering Peace

One of the more recent peace projects, "Engendering Peace," is unique in involving only women and working with groups both in the north and south. Funded by the Dutch government, this process has representatives from all the major southern factions, various representatives from northern civil society groups and certain non-partisan groups (e.g. NSCC; Sudanese Women's Voice for Peace; Sudanese Women's Association, Nairobi) (Kima, 2000). A series of seminars has been attended by the southern groups involving negotiation, advocacy, lobbying (LoWilla, 2000). Ambassador Kiplagat served recently as a facilitator for dialogue in Khartoum with the northern groups. In that dialogue, a sharing at an individual level of traumas resulting from the civil war by people both north and south was particularly moving (Kiplagat, 2000). For example, as lead facilitator, he spoke separately with the northerners about racial bias which all protested as not present. He then moved to a consideration of people's color. "Do people have different skin colors?" "Yes," many replied. "There are several different colors – brown, red, green, black." "And which are better?" he pushed. "Well, brown is best, then red, then green . . . black is at the bottom of the list." Then after a pause, they responded, "Oh, I see what you mean" (Kiplagat, 2000). Thus far, no direct linkage between the People-to-People peace process and this project has occurred. However, NSCC is a member of the non-partisan group from the south and SCC is a member of the civil society group in the north.

4)   Sudanese Women's Initiatives

The many active women's groups also contribute a great deal to continuing dialogue and parallel peace work. Two groups in particular stand out, the Sudanese Women's Voice for Peace working in Sudan and the Sudanese Women's Association in Nairobi (SWAN). The latter group does not use the word "peace" but stresses participation and those things that all Sudanese have in common – concerns for children, education, health, household income and emotional support. Formed in response to the splits within the SPLA beginning in 1991, an emergency meeting of some 160 women was held and action taken to address their common concerns. A pattern of taking on work in groups of 29 women has resulted in several projects all under the theme of economic empowerment and working together. The idea of working together has been the key factor allowing bridges to be built across factional lines and embracing those Sudanese women from the north as well. With this history it was asserted that the People-to-People peace process is "more than just that done by NSCC." This process is alive in the work of SWAN (Riak, Nyoka and Hakim, 2000).

IV.   THE PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE PEACE PROCESS

A)   Why People Came Together for This Process

This process needed a convergence of institutional support (NSCC), a certain level of military and political support and a readiness on the part of masses of people on the local

level to proceed. All of this came together in the latter part of the decade. Church workers noted that people were willing to take some risks for peace (Ruun and Deng, 2000). Some of the key motivations from each of these sectors can be summarized as follows.

1) NSCC

- Acting on the mandate from Yei 1997 NSCC-SPLM/SPLA dialogue (see item IV B below).
- The church efforts of working with the leadership had not yielded good results (e.g. the earlier Nairobi meetings, 1991-1992, facilitated by NSCC and NCCK).
- PCOS-facilitated efforts involving local chiefs and people at the grassroots had better, though mixed, results (e.g. the 1994 Akobo meetings – see III A 4 above).
- Support from NSCC partners was strong and could be counted upon for a new peace initiative.

2) SPLA and UDSF factions plus politicians

- A growing recognition that both military and political moves had failed to win agreement, eliminate the opposition and had served only to deplete the south in the face of their continuing adversarial relationship with the north.
- Military victory cannot come unless the south is united.
- All armed factions need the cooperation of the traditional chiefs for sustained recruitment of soldiers. Thus, improved relationships between the armed forces and local communities are needed.

3) The people at the grassroots

- Enough killing, abduction of children and women, loss of livestock, destruction of homes and crops, dislocation and famine had occurred to shift people's allegiance from cooperating with war to working for peace.
- Particularly for the Nuer and Dinka, the lands occupied by one are at various times needed by the other. The Nuer come to the Dinka in the wet season when floodwaters cause the Nuer to shift locations. And the Dinka come to the Nuer in the dry season. Both had avoided the "toich," the rich well watered grasslands of the riverine lands as a "no-go" area due to the Dinka-Nuer conflicts while famine had devastated much of the south in 1998. Such avoidance was no longer acceptable by either Dinka or Nuer.

To the outsider concerned to know what "drives" this People-to-People peace process, no easy answer can be given. NSCC is more the facilitator and catalyst acting from its own mandates and structures coupled with a broad-based awakening at the grassroots and a

favorable alignment of politicians and military forces as outlined above. In terms of how NSCC takes action, that is subject to both a broad and selective process of discernment involving church leaders, partners and other institutional colleagues. (For example, the delay and follow-up on the Nile East Bank Peace Conference illustrates this process. The reciprocal balance to last year's Wunlit gathering was to have the Dinka come to the Nuer in the East Bank. This had been scheduled for early 2000, but due to the continued instabilities among the Nuer, this was not possible. The alternative site of Liliir among the Bor Dinka for the Nile East Bank Peace Conference in May 2000 was chosen only after detailed consultations and agreements among all participating ethnic communities.)

B. Meeting at Yei, NSCC-SPLM/SPLA Dialogue, 1997, Foundation for People-to-People Peace Process

1)   What Happened

Not until later in the 1990s was the church in southern Sudan able to speak with one sure and clear voice. The earlier part of the decade was spent in simply getting organized both administratively and among the member churches. Thus, some of the earlier church-related peace efforts (e.g. the Akobo peace work) were more the product of individual church efforts than genuinely owned by the wider church in southern Sudan. Given the split in the ranks of the SPLA, and some criticism that the church was doing little to assist in the struggle for liberation, even actively sheltering SPLA deserters, a growing antagonism set in between the church and army. From the church's perspective, the SPLA was at times and places taking on more the character of an oppressive occupation force with its forced recruitment and seizure of food items. This "drifting apart" and "increasing misunderstandings" was seen as not helpful and in need of dialogue by both the SPLM and NSCC (Phillippo, 2000; Miller, 2000). Accordingly, from July 21 to 24, 1997, a dialogue between the church and movement was held, "to collaborate and co-operate in their search for just and lasting peace and freedom for the peoples of New Sudan" (New Sudan Council of Churches, 1998).

The church had sought endorsement of its "active role as mediator in attempts to reconcile differences between the factions and groups in southern Sudan." The resulting NSCC/SPLM/A Yei Declaration, July 1997 provides this endorsement and calls for "ways and means through which the Church can pursue reconciliation efforts and unity among the political/military groups struggling for the liberation of Southern Sudan" (New Sudan Council of Churches, 1998). This affirmation follows from the acknowledgment that the churches represented by NSCC could move from group to group and faction to faction. And it is from this gathering at Yei that NSCC dates the beginning of the People-to-People peace process (Phillippo, 2000).

It is instructive to note the perspective of different parties on the origin of this process and responsibility for it. While the NSCC has become responsible administratively for the People-to-People process and dates the beginning of this work from the Yei meeting, nothing in the Report or Declaration speaks clearly to what became later a clear

preference for reconciliation work. This preference is *not* for work among leaders or groups as seems to be suggested by the Yei Declaration, but among local grassroots communities. The NSCC peace work is no longer Leader-to-Leader (i.e. not the previous model used in the Nairobi meetings of 1991- 1992) but People-to-People (Phillippo, 2000). Yet, the SPLM claims to have initiated this process while gradually shifting to the background so that the NSCC could be seen as the prime facilitator (Kwaje, 2000).

2) What resulted from the Yei conference?

- The NSCC leaves this dialogue with a commitment to peace and reconciliation at the local level (Phillippo, 2000). It is found that cooperation with the Presbyterian Church of Sudan (PCOS) is critical given that much of that church lies within areas controlled by Riek Machar. "It is hoped that PCOS would be able to advise NSCC in its attempt at dialogue with Dr. Machar" (New Sudan Council of Churches, 1998). This result led directly to the collaboration with Bill Lowrey, an American missionary long involved with the PCOS and concerned with conflict resolution and traditional approaches to reconciliation. Bill Lowrey was able to travel to Khartoum and serve as the NSCC link to Riek Machar while providing helpful networking in the United States.

- The development of a chaplaincy training program is initiated under the auspices of NSCC. A first training of about 90 chaplains was held in 1999. A second is planned for 2000. These chaplains are to minister and provide spiritual counsel to fighting forces in the south. The program is still in its infancy (Ring, 2000).

- The church was strongly criticized for "undermining cultural values." NSCC opens to a wider collaboration with African Religion, traditional chiefs and spiritual leaders in its work for peace (New Sudan Council of Churches, 1998).

- Some recognition is given to a separation of purpose between the church and military (i.e. "pursuing an end to the conflict by peaceful means" versus an armed liberation struggle). But the church is seen by many observers to identify completely with the struggle for liberation (New Sudan Council of Churches, 1998).

C. The process thus far

1.   Lokichokio, Kenya, June 1998

a) What Happened?

The gathering in Lokichokio, Kenya, was the first peace activity of NSCC following the direction at Yei to work for peace and reconciliation. Attending were church leaders

from the Episcopal Church of Sudan, PCOS, the RCC and invited chiefs from Dinka and Nuer clans of both the East Bank from Upper Nile and the West Bank from Bahr el Ghazal and West Upper Nile. Intersecting with NSCC's focus on this theme was the interest and ability of Bill Lowrey given his work with the PCOS and research on the Akobo peace work of 1994. For the Lokichokio meeting, Bill Lowrey was called by NSCC to serve as consultant and facilitator.

The purpose of the Lokichokio gathering was to determine whether a broad-scale, Dinka-Nuer reconciliation was feasible. Accordingly, 19 church leaders and chiefs were brought out to Kenya on "neutral ground" for:

- Relationship Building and Reconciliation
- Developing Skills of Conflict Analysis and Peacemaking Strategies
- Designing Peacemaking Strategies

The result was agreement "to hold a series of meetings throughout all communities in the East and West Banks of the Nile to pursue all possible means towards a just and lasting peace in the land of Nuer and Dinka." As a result of the meeting, it was decided that the next step in this process would be to have a West Bank Nile assembly of Nuer and Dinka (Nuer-Dinka Loki Accord, 1998).

What Resulted from the Lokichokio conference?

- Dinka and Nuer reconciliation on West Bank of the Nile feasible and should move forward (Nuer-Dinka Loki Accord, 1998)

- The methods and goals for peace and reconciliation work from both Bill Lowrey and NSCC seem compatible

2. Dinka-Nuer Covenant; Wunlit, March 1999

a) What Happened?

The planning and organization for this West Bank Nile assembly was extensive and detailed. The logistics alone for this operation — involving several aircraft shuttles, provision of safe airstrips, communication, living quarters and food for nearly 2000 people over a two week period — strained capacity in all directions and was well beyond what NSCC had attempted before. The concern for security and political considerations alone nearly wrecked the proceeding at least two points. Donor support, funding, facilitation and process design all required a great deal of careful, coordinated planning.

From the viewpoint of some among NSCC's partners, the peace process started rather slowly with questions unanswered. How were delegates to the Dinka-Nuer West Bank Conference to be chosen? What would be the process of facilitation? How will the process insure that it is not "hijacked" by politicians? A briefing for partners by NSCC in the last months of 1998 was meant to inform but doubts remained (Svenson, 2000). In

the end, NSCC trusted in local chiefs, church leaders and people to select proper delegates. A certain limit was given to each area and delegates up to that limit were selected locally (Mour Mour, 2000).

The process used at the Lokichokio gathering in 1998 proved very helpful in overcoming mistrust and bitterness (Lowrey, 1998). Story-telling, using both values drawn from biblical stories and those cultural traditions for working through difficulties plus the responses of the participants provided a rich interwoven fabric for building relationships, speaking the truth, gaining healing and moving forward. This same process would be used at Wunlit. The difference here at Wunlit would be that special committees would be set up for each of the issues raised in the story-telling phase and charged with bringing back recommendations for action on each specific item. Six working groups were established as a result: Missing Persons and Marriages to Abductees, Reclaiming the Land and Rebuilding Relationships, Institutional Arrangements, Monitoring the Borders, People Outside the Peace Process, and Extending the Peace to the East Bank of the Nile and Equatoria (Wunlit Dinka-Nuer Peace Documents, 27 February-8 March 1999). The NSCC organizing committee took the leadership role in conference facilitation, assigning people as committee reporters and committee heads, passing out identification tags, providing easels, boards and markers in a very mixed process of African tradition and Western conflict resolution group process. For example, in a marked departure from the general spirit of amnesty prevailing, the committee head for Missing Persons and Marriages to Abductees announced that those men who had abducted women for the purpose of making them a wife would now be required to pay a fine. Tensions immediately escalated. In response, Bill Lowrey, one of the conference facilitators, inquired of the committee process on this. It had not been discussed in committee and as a result this proposal was referred back to committee for further discussion (Vick, 1999). The proposal on fines eventually was dropped illustrating the process of consensus-building and group management by committee.

Preparations were made in stages. Approximately one month prior to the start of the gathering, Dinka and Nuer chiefs exchanged visits to the other's territory to assure themselves that the desire for peace was genuine and to provide some assurance to their people that they would be safe if they came to the gathering. It was told that one very large Dinka chief upon visiting the Nuer at this time had his feet washed and was then picked up and carried overhead by joyous Nuer women. A profound impact was made and the generosity reciprocated (Lowrey, 2000).

The security for such a large gathering was key. Two issues provoked some concern. What some had characterized as communication difficulty between SPLA and NSCC was in fact some junior SPLA commanders' apparent discomfort with Telar Deng's role at the Peace Desk of NSCC, given his criticisms of human rights violations by members of SPLA. This was discussed at length with the appropriate people and finally settled. The other issue related to the demand of Dr. Michael Wal Duany, a Nuer academic, for security guarantees from John Garang, Commander-in-Chief of the SPLA. This reportedly became such an issue that the Wunlit gathering itself was in question shortly before the beginning. Reportedly, the pleas of Riek Machar to drop this request

convinced Wal Duany to not press the issue. Machar at that time was the head of the principal Nuer faction, UDSF, which had signed the Sudan Peace Agreement and did not attend the Wunlit gathering. He did however, agree to the meeting taking place and later took credit for its success.

Commander Salva Kiir Mayardit, the Deputy to John Garang of the SPLA, personally saw to everyone's safety and played a key backstage role working closely with NSCC staff and local helpers. Apart from his initial welcoming at the start of the gathering, he and others from the SPLA remained on the periphery. Most importantly, his initial remarks conveyed the message that we guarantee your security and that we will abide by your decisions (Ruun, 2000). The then governor of Bahr el Ghazal, Nhial Deng Nhial also attended the meeting on the periphery, and gave it his support.

The successful accommodation of the 2000 or so people who came to Wunlit for the Nile West Bank conference was due in large measure to the work on the ground of the Bahr el Ghazal Youth Development Association (BYDA). Mario Mour Mour, Director of BYDA, in close cooperation with Telar Deng of NSCC made an assessment of possible venues and needs in September 1998. The Wunlit site was selected because of its border position and relative remoteness. After sorting out what both the people and NSCC could provide, the BYDA organized 300 local people who:

- helped create 12 km. of new road
- built a new 1.5 km airstrip
- constructed a new meeting hall for 1000 people (now used as a school)
- built 150 houses
- and provided food, water, firewood and cooking for the conference.

NSCC provided kits consisting of blankets, mosquito nets and other personal items, dug wells for water and managed the necessary air and land transport (Mour Mour, 2000; Wunlit Dinka-Nuer Peace Documents, 27 February-8 March 1999).

b)   What Resulted?

- Covenant enacted between Dinka, Nuer and God/"Nhialic" with the blessing of the churches and sacrifice of the large white bull. The church reaffirms the importance of cultural traditions and rituals in cultivating a rich sense of identity. Traditional people are looking for help and the church can assist in finding a balance between "modern" life and "tradition" (Ruun, 2000).

- Commanders and politicians are tuning into the changed dynamics at the local level. The rising power of old chiefs coupled with mass mobilization as at Wunlit is very persuasive. It is acknowledged that for recruitment into the military forces to proceed smoothly, the military needs the compliance of the traditional chiefs. Moreover, it is seen that the south

can never win militarily without unity, which this peace process is forging (Deng, 2000; Ruun and Deng, 2000).

- The local, vulnerable people who have suffered are the ones now seen coming together to freely engage in dialogue. The politicians are not the ones in dialogue (Ruun, 2000; Murphy, 2000).

- Agreements on return of women, children and cattle (Wunlit Dinka-Nuer Peace Documents, 1999). At the Peace Council meeting in Yirol, September 1999, it is reported that 148 abductees were returned, 141 cattle returned not covered in the amnesty, 5 proper marriages involving abductees, arrest and arraignment of leaders of the one identified violation, extensive trading routes opened (Dinka-Nuer West Bank Peace Council, 1999).

- A Dinka-Nuer West Bank Peace Council structured, and agreement on certain civil authority and law to be put into place. The first meeting of the Peace Council is held in Yirol in September and action taken on immediate and longer term plans (Dinka-Nuer West Bank Peace Council, 1999).

- Free movement (Okumu and Garang, 2000) Nuer walk home through Dinka territory (Mour Mour, 2000).

- Renewed utilization of the "toic," the well-watered savannah pasture on the Dinka-Nuer borderlands, for grazing and fishing by both groups (Ruun, 2000; Okumu and Garang, 2000).

- Distant positive effects as news of the accord circulates – refugee camps, universities, the Diaspora (Peter, 2000). Dinka and Nuer now talking freely (Ter and Madol, 2000).

- Dinka accommodate some 20,000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDP), mostly Nuer, near Makuac and Maper without major incident due to the Wunlit Covenant. These IDP resulted from the attacks of Government-supported militia (e.g. the SSUA led by General Paulino Matiep) around the Bentiu oilfields to the north in the later half of 1999 (Verney, 1999; Riak, A., 2000; Mour Mour, 2000).

- Some criticism that the agreement for associated development and services to "consolidate" the agreements has not followed and may contribute to the lack of sustainability for the covenant. For example, there have been reports of Dinka and Nuer women fighting with their hands at the water wells used by the Dinka given the lack of water in the places set aside for the Nuer IDP (Mour Mour, 2000).

- More politics introduced and armaments injected into the hands of certain commanders. Yet on the ground locally, there is a strong desire for peace. Only the commanders and politicians at the top are the ones seen as still scheming and promoting hostilities.

- NSCC seen to be achieving its goals (Ruun, 2000). "Peace Mobilizers" have been set up under NSCC's Peace Desk. Three regions have been identified for this work with some positions filled, others still vacant (Bahr el Ghazal: 1 man [not yet filled], 1 woman; Upper Nile: 2 men, 1 woman [Anna Kima]; and Equatoria: 1 man and 1 woman [not yet filled]). The role is seen as one of education, sensitization and linking communities, very important for the sustainability of the peace process (Deng, 2000; Kima, 2000).

- The pro-Sudanese government group, British-Sudanese Public Affairs Council, has issued a recent report making the point that the Wunlit agreements are simply resolving a long-standing inter-ethnic tradition of raiding and abduction, not unlike other such raiding in the country. The report continues, "The Wunlit Accords also clearly reinforces the Sudanese Government's position, dismissed by some partisan groups, that what had been presented as 'slavery' to naïve Western observers was in fact raiding, abductions and kidnappings within ages – old inter – tribal conflict" (The British-Sudanese Public Affairs Council, 2000). The significance is in the use of the Wunlit agreements to deflect criticism of the Government on slavery and human rights abuse.

- Much publicity in Europe and North America, raising expectations and attracting notice. Many close observers feel that that this publicity served to underscore the peace conferences as events rather than a process, generating a dynamic of "success" or "failure" for these gatherings-seen-as-events. Thus, invitations to the upcoming Nile East Bank Nilotic Conference are curtailed.

3. Women's Peace Workshop; Lokichokio, Kenya, June 1999

Within three months of the Wunlit conference, a peace and reconciliation workshop for 21 women from Nuer, Dinka and Murle communities over a five-day period (June 11-15, 1999) was organized by NSCC in Lokichokio, Kenya, led by Dr. Agnes Aboum of Kenya and Anna Kima of NSCC. Its purpose was to give voice to women's roles and responsibilities and to publicly commit and support efforts "to bring reconciliation and peace within our communities and the Sudan as a whole." At the conclusion, all the women signed a workshop-produced set of resolutions "to show our commitment and willingness to achieve peace in our community" (NSCC Women's Peace Workshop, 1999).

One observer recalled a statement at the Wunlit conference by a group of women that made it plain that the decision-making for either peace or war was shared and that the continued fighting, particularly Nuer-Dinka, would have severe consequences. The women said, "We are not stupid! We have our ways and will not bear children if this fighting continues!" According to this observer, a temporary but stunned silence from the gathering was the response (Ruun, 2000). The appointment by NSCC of women "peace mobilizers," like Anna Kima and this workshop served as acknowledgement that the People-to-People process needed the active involvement of women.

One of the joint statements from this June workshop echoes this conviction, "we are desirous to be part and parcel of the peace process within our communities of Nuer, Dinka and Murle." This stance of joining the peace process by the women was reflected in both the condemnation of abductions and rape by the inter-factional fighting and in the acknowledgement that women have also been responsible for encouraging conflict through songs that taunt their husbands into taking up arms (NSCC Women's Peace Workshop, 1999).

Near to the training site was the Kakuma refugee camp that holds largely Sudanese refugees. One of the workshop resolutions was to work with the women in the camp, to hold prayer meetings "to preach reconciliation and peace." Another was to take women from the camp and others from the Sudan, forming a joint committee to go into southern Sudan "to conduct ecumenical prayers in call(ing) for peace in our Land." The proposal for the prayer meetings has since occurred (Phillippo, 2000) and is carried forward in workshops by the NSCC theological educator Bullen Nginzo.

4. Together We Remain United in Action for Peace; Khartoum/Nairobi, July 1999

In July of 1999, Sudanese churches (i.e. both the Sudan Council of Churches and the New Sudan Council of Churches) reaffirmed their stand for peace noting the obligation of the church "to be in the midst of and care for the suffering." The statement that resulted in this reaffirmation reminds the reader of the churches' calling noting that the church "supports the cause for the well being and justice for all the marginalised and oppressed people of the Sudan irrespective of their religious and ethnic belonging." This calling further states the belief that "the problems of Sudan will not be solved by violence" and that "repentance and forgiveness are necessary to the process of reconciliation." However, it underscores "for forgiveness to have a lasting and real meaning, there must be a full and honest accounting of the facts and public confessions of crimes and other wrongdoings committed against our fellow citizens" (Sudan Council of Churches and New Sudan Council of Churches, 1999).

Accordingly, this statement continues to list the churches' vision of a peaceful Sudan couched in a human rights framework. The principles listed are:
- Equality of rights
- Good Governance
- Cultural Diversity

- Religious Freedom
- Human Rights in Armed Conflicts
- Dialogue
- Political Education
- Public Confession

Several "practical steps" are then urged for action centered on the separation of armed forces, cease-fire and "an agreed mechanism and timetable for the referendum to be supervised by UN, OAU and the Arab League" (Sudan Council of Churches and New Sudan council of Churches, 1999).

5.   Chukudum; August 1999

a)What Happened?

Receiving much less publicity has been the effort of NSCC to promote peace and reconciliation in Eastern Equatoria. This peace involvement of the NSCC has been considerably more connected to the military and not in the form of the other People-to-People initiatives with much more mixed results. Both the NSCC and the SPLM/A formed a joint committee headed by a very senior authority in the SPLA and Rev. John Okumu, Chairman of the NSCC Executive Committee, to "investigate the causes to the Chukudum conflict" rather than convene a large people's conference as in Wunlit. The emphasis was on leaders and fact-finding. The Covenant of Peace and Reconciliation lays out the problem as "disgruntled/dissident" SPLA elements in combination with Government of Sudan-supported militia troops preying upon a civilian population. Moreover, communities in the Chukudum area have come to nurture resentment and hostility toward both the SPLA and Nilotic peoples living as internally-displaced persons in local camps. The SPLA is seen as dominated by Dinka and insensitive to local needs. After a series of 21 separate findings and 26 recommendations, 9 resolutions are passed essentially saying: arrest the trouble-makers, hostile acts should cease, the Didinga community should cease cooperation with Government of Sudan supported militia and a general amnesty applies for all offences committed as part of the "Chukudum conflict" (NSCC, 1999; Kwaje, 2000).

b)   What Resulted?

- The recommendations of the Covenant of Peace and Reconciliation, worked out in August 1999, seem not to have been followed.

- Continued insecurity, tension and instability (Kwaje, 2000; Ruun, 2000). An SPLA soldier shot and killed a Didinga chief, Joseph Nakwa Lonyangaluka, one reportedly very much committed to the reconciliation process (Phillippo, 1999). The Lord's Resistance Army, an Ugandan militia, reportedly equipped and supported by the Government of Sudan, ambushed eight humanitarian aid workers in Sudan.

- Escalation of military action in the area (Kwaje, 2000).

- Military action by an "integrated" SPLA force against criminal elements and GoS-supported militia said by SPLM and others to be restoring stability (75% of the area pacified) and bringing in Didinga SPLA recruits (Kwaje, 2000).

- Some 8000-11,000 internally displaced, mostly Dinka, Nuer and Shilluk, to be returned for resettlement elsewhere (Kwaje, 2000).

- Rising concern that NSCC's movement for Nilotic peoples' peace conferences should be extended to other areas with similar conflicts. The Dadinga community, in particular, is feeling left out because their crisis has gone on long without any intervention. The August 1999 recommendations seem not yet to have been taken up (LoWilla, 2000).

- Diocese of Torit (Roman Catholic) and local women's groups working on regaining harmony. Moreover, an NSCC peace team went to the refugee camps of northern Uganda in December 1999 for prayer and peace among the Dadinga and Dinka in the camps (Phillippo, 1999).

- Very little publicity if at all.

- The Liliir site (focus of the East Bank Nile Peace Conference of May 2000) is being currently used as the transit point for the return of the internally displaced peoples in the Chukudum area.

- A Chukudum People-to-People Peace conference is scheduled for July 2000.

6. Nuer agreement; Akobo, August 1999

In stark contrast to the involvement with the Chukudum conflict, four days later the NSCC issued a Press Release signed by Dr. Haruun Ruun, Executive Secretary announcing "a major breakthrough in the People-to-People peace process in southern Sudan." The breakthrough was essentially a round of shuttle diplomacy which secured a military agreement on the disposition of three separate military forces (SPLA, SSDF and the Government-supported forces of Simon Gatwic) for the provision of humanitarian assistance and development projects (NSCC, 1999b).

At the initial NSCC peace meetings in Lokichokio, conflict was acknowledged in several areas, particularly among the Nuer of the Nile East Bank. The direction for the Nile West Bank conference at Wunlit was given because that was believed to be more feasible. But the mounting conflict among the Nuer and attendant food and health needs of the civilian population had forced the withdrawal of humanitarian organizations and was creating an international mandate for needed action. The press release notes "the inability of the

United Nations World Food Programme to deliver urgently needed food for communities suffering very high rates of malnutrition" (NSCC, 1999b).

Thus, a "Nuer Peace Team, under the facilitation of the New Sudan Council of Churches and the active support of the Presbyterian Church of Sudan" worked actively with the military leadership, local chiefs and church leaders. A final meeting in the town of Akobo resulted in agreement. A two-step process is acknowledged. Military forces agreed to cease hostilities and a later governance conference for the Lou Nuer was scheduled for October to establish a civil administrative structure. As a result, "free and unhindered access of NGOs to all parts of Lou Nuer to alleviate the present suffering of the people and to meet their basic needs in food, health, clean drinking water, education, etc." was provided. Moreover, the application of this "cooperative model" was recommended for application in Nasir, Fangak and Bentiu (NSCC, 1999b).

7. Waat Lou Nuer Covenant; November 1999

a) What Happened?

The Waat Lou Nuer Covenant is primarily about governance and "extending the hand of peace." Building on the Akobo military agreement of August 1999, and a joint military coordinating council set up in September, the Waat gathering was the natural next step. The Covenant describes its work: "We have met to establish a lasting peace, to build a common system of governance and to appeal to others to join us in rebuilding our communities and spreading this peace and reconciliation to all of South Sudan." The NSCC press release speaks of efforts "to rebuild the civil administration, establish a police system, and re-empower the traditional court system of chiefs." What is significant is again a seemingly broad-based approach of chiefs and church leaders, youth, women, representatives of the different military commands, all sections of the Nuer, and invited guests. One thousand additional participants augmented one hundred official delegates. Following nearly a week of deliberation, a covenant signing was sealed by a traditional sacrifice of a white bull and Christian worship. At the closing celebrations and worship well over 3000 people were present (Waat Lou Nuer Covenant, 1999; NSCC, 1999c). The "Word of Promise" in the Waat Lou Nuer Covenant is especially pointed and aimed at stemming the continued hostilities, suffering and confusion which has dominated among the Nuer recently. It says:

> We will protect this peace against anyone from within our ranks or who
> would come against us from the outside attempting to destroy our unity
> and peace. For this peace we are willing to die so that our children may
> live in peace and enjoy this good land that God has given to us.

b) What Resulted?

- No significant fighting among the Nuer. As stated in the Waat Lou Nuer Covenant, "We stand ready to resolve any outstanding issues and build a permanent peace."

- The "extending the hand of peace" to the Gaawar & Jikany Nuer as expressed in the Waat Lou Nuer Covenant leads to continued contact but no coming together. "The Nuer are not fighting but not moving forward either." (Ter and Madol, 2000)

- A gradual conversion and realignment of forces in Upper Nile Province underway through 1999 leading to the creation of the Upper Nile Military Command Council (UMCC). The first step was the August Military Agreement in Akobo bringing order among the Lou Nuer. Military forces are integrated with leadership positions given to SSDF, SPLA and SSUA plus the Government-supported militia of Simon Gatwic. A distribution along Nuer clan lines is observed in the appointment of these leaders. The UMCC unilaterally declares that the SSDF has removed itself from the Khartoum government and from the leadership of Riek Machar. "The UMCC and its emerging political structure declare a resumption of the armed struggle with the GOS and intention to cooperate with all forces fighting the GOS." (Lowrey, 2000a).

- Formation of Wal Duany's SSLM accompanied by claims to have the allegiance of most of Riek Machar's top commanders (South Sudan Liberation Movement, 2000).

- Subsequently, Riek Machar returns to the Nuer from Khartoum, declares the Khartoum Peace Agreement of April 1997 (which he signed) a failure, rallies his troops and recasts the UDSF as SPDF (Sudan People's Democratic Front, 2000).

- These moves by political leaders create tension and raise questions of commander loyalty. As a result, the Nile East Bank peace conference, scheduled for early in 2000, is moved from a Nuer site.

- Some observers cast the Waat accord a "failure" because it is seen as dominated by politicians though noting many areas of agreement (McDermott, 2000).

- SPLM criticizes NSCC for not consulting with them prior to Waat and for fostering the formation of political parties (Kwaje, 2000).

- It is believed by some that the formation of Wal Duany's SSLM movement was the manifestation of the Waat mandate for political governance and structure, though that is now contested by Riek Machar (Lowrey, 2000).

- Claim by the MP for Unity State, Tot Galwak, that the defection of Tito Biel, a senior SSDF commander, to the SPLA was the "secret part" of the

Wunlit peace conference, allowing for gradual defections from the SSDF to the SPLA (Verney, 1999).

8. East Bank Nilotic Conference; May 2000

References in both the Wunlit and Chukudum conferences include a broadening of the peace process. This was made even more explicit in the Waat Lou Nuer Covenant in inviting all Nilotic peoples on the East Bank of the Nile (Shilluk, Nuer, Murle, Dinka, Anuak, Maban and others) to send delegations to a People-to-People peace conference scheduled then for February 2000. The plan is to have some 200 to 300 delegates from these communities plus other invited guests. Thus far, only about a third of the necessary funding has been secured, but great optimism exists at NSCC that this People-to-People process will continue to unfold (Phillippo, 2000).

As of March 1, 2000, a specific site had not yet been selected. Regrettably, this site could not be in Nuer territory due to continuing instability, confusion and political "dueling" among Nuer leaders, specifically Riek Machar and Wal Duany.[8] As a Nuer pastor said recently, "the Nuer are not fighting but they are not moving forward either" (Ter and Madol, 2000). The uniqueness and symmetry of the Dinka now sacrificing a bull in Nuer territory as the Nuer had done in Dinka territory at the Wunlit conference will be lost if this conference is prevented from proceeding at a Nuer site. Nevertheless, it is believed that pressing forward with an enlarged peace process is better than delaying, even if not ideal (Peter, 2000; Ashworth, 2000).[9]

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[8] As of February 1, 2000, Wal Duany, as Chairman of the Interim Executive Committee had issued a press release announcing the formation of the South Sudan Liberation Movement (SSLM), the political wing of the Upper Nile Provisional Military Command Council (UMCC). The Waat peace conference, on November 4, 1999, was claimed to establish the groundwork for this particular party. The SSLM will pursue two methods of self-determination; through the IGAD peace process and armed struggle. Moreover, the statement continues asserting that SSLM will pursue political mobilization, peace and reconciliation among the communities, security and stability and dialogue with the political and military groups in south Sudan. Within two weeks, Riek Machar had returned from Khartoum, issued a press release claiming the "collapse" of the 1997 Sudan Peace Agreement, announced the formation of the Sudan People's Democratic Front and a people's army to be known as the Sudan People's Defence Force (SPDF), and claimed a commitment to: human rights, good governance, self-determination, political pluralism, and IGAD's peace initiatives. The allegiance of commanders in the field to either leader is unclear with claims disputed by both parties.

[9] As of May, 2000, the Liliir East Bank Nilotic peoples People-to-People Peace Conference has occurred (May 9 – 15, 2000) involving the Anyuak, Dinka, Jie, Kachipo, Murle and Nuer communities in a process and outcome very similar to the Dinka – Nuer Covenant at Wunlit, March, 1999. At Liliir, agreements were reached on: the identification of missing persons, return of abductees and recognition of marriages; free movement of people & their animals and the provision of access to animal water points and grazing areas; the identification of common borders & the establishment of border chiefs, police, courts and patrols; monitoring the peace agreement; encouragement for the resolution of internal Nuer conflicts; developing the reconciliations between the Gawaar Nuer and Padang and Bor Dinka; resolving the tensions between the Lou Nuer and Anyuak in Akobo; bringing about dialogue with the Pibor and Murle and safeguarding the peace process from political opportunism and encouraging the participation of the remaining Upper Nile groups to join the process. Again both traditional authorities and church leaders played important roles in moving this process from the telling of stories, rebuttal, comments and observations to the nine

V.   ANALYSIS

The New Sudan Council of Churches People-to-People peace process cannot be isolated cleanly from the other conflict systems at work in Sudan. At the surface it would appear that two conflict systems are at work, the north-south conflict most identify as the Sudanese civil war, now spanning some forty-five years of strife, Africa's longest running armed conflict. The other conflict system is the south-south system of essentially ethnic tension and "factional" fighting which the People-to-People process most directly addresses. But other systems of conflict are also at work. There is the assertion of church authority along ethnic lines over the growing voice of the NSCC in trying to speak with one voice for the church throughout southern Sudan. There is the conflict of the church trying to contend with the outside world and the demands placed on it by a host of ecumenical organizations largely based in Europe. There is also the church largely identified with the struggle for liberation but still in tension and dialogue with the various southern Sudanese military units. And finally, there is the struggle in southern Sudan for an African authenticity that gives honor rather than abuse to African cosmology and seeks to give space and voice to that which is seemingly so easy to ignore, sweep aside or impose upon in the interest of either the modern secular state or an Arabic Islamic state. All of these conflicts feed into one another and create a complexity well beyond just the simple portrait of a church-supported peace effort for ill or good.

Some conflict analysts can easily picture a set of nested conflict systems, neatly contained and interrelated from the local to the global. One is tempted to try to contort the conflicts here into some nested system, but rather than nested, I would describe these interrelated conflicts as turbulent and present whether one adopts a very macro or micro perspective. In this concluding section, these conflicts will be teased apart with comment on their connections and significance.

A. Political Observations

A. *IGAD*

The NSCC is working toward more connection with the IGAD peace process. In fact, although some would regard the NSCC People-to-People peace process as extending only to the point of achieving unity within the south, others believe that the process should be extended until the commanders and Government of Sudan are "compelled to come" for lasting peace and reconciliation. The intersection of NSCC with IGAD is one further step in the process (Ruun, 2000). This is urged from many quarters and seen as a justice issue by some. The IGAD process is not working transparently, no civil society is being forged and only the players at the top are involved (Peter, 2000; LoWilla, 2000). This move to broaden lines of communication and link both the grassroots progress for peace and reconciliation with the higher levels of state-to-state discourse can only benefit the

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working groups, later discussion, amendment and consensus approval. The conference was opened and closed by the ritual sacrifice of a white ox.

long-term peacebuilding process. But that cannot be done while ignoring the mandates that created the IGAD peace process. As one senior diplomat observed recently about this issue, "there is no problem in being there and in meeting, talking, raising issues – the dialogue. That's the key. There needs to be linkages at all levels… But there are many creative ways for providing that" (Kiplagat, 2000). The IGAD Partners' Forum is apparently playing a role in the formation of several technical committees which may help in broadening this dialogue (Peter, 2000).

2) Political Forum

When NSCC staff are asked about the criticism of the church process as fostering political parties, the reply has been essentially that NSCC cannot be responsible for those with political aspirations. NSCC sees their responsibilities as on the ground with the local people where the good work is moving forward (Phillippo, 2000). But the NSCC peace process has actually worked with *both* military leaders/politicians (e.g. Yei, Chukudum and the Akobo Nuer military agreement) *and* local people, churches and chiefs (e.g. Wunlit, Waat). And while deliberately working at the grassroots without the higher-level leaders, the significance and kind of connections to the leaders from these grassroots cannot be ignored or dismissed as though the *only* thing that matters is the reality "on the ground." A more formal mechanism for keeping politicians on board with the NSCC peace process is needed (Ashworth, 2000). Others would expand this as a need to create the space for a forum for all southern Sudanese politicians to come for dialogue on strategy and goals in response to the civil war. "Unity among the southern politicians is the number one priority for the peace of the Sudan. The absence of a common strategy and common understanding is the single most subversive element in the Sudan situation" (Miller, 2000).

The search for such a mechanism may have some overlap with NSCC's concern to have more of a voice at the IGAD process. Just as the push for representation at IGAD is a necessary "vertical" linkage of the peace process, more effort at the "horizontal" linkages reaching to the political/military leaders is needed. Such an effort not only deflects criticism later but also builds the needed relationships and trust that serve to keep the process sustainable.

3) People and Leaders

Some commanders are tuning into the "voice of the people" as a result of the People-to-People peace process and becoming less prone to operate without some sense of accountability, be that in Equatoria or Upper Nile. That the NSCC peace process has been able to demonstrate a profound discontinuity between the leadership and people is a symptom of the deeper conflict beneath, the struggle for African authenticity (see earlier section on African cosmology and following section on The Church and African Religion).

From the earlier gathering at Lokichokio and amplified at Wunlit was the message from the people that this conflict of Dinka-Nuer was brought to them, that they did not ask for

it (Deng, 2000). Following the Waat peace conference the dispiriting image is plain of a very few leaders at the top exhorting the masses to follow them and then turning to see that very few in fact have done so resulting in further harangues and pleas. This image is expressed in the "Word of Promise" of the Waat Lou Nuer Covenant (1999), referred to above, warning of anyone coming to destroy our unity and peace.

Finally, interest in the NSCC process for peace and reconciliation in southern Sudan by peace researchers has voiced the concern for the respective roles of "insiders" and "outsiders." Yet, if these two distinctions have any value it is more by degree and context than in clear separations. NSCC is in one context an "inside" agency. It is an organization directed by Southern Sudanese church people and thus "inside" Sudan, but to a significant degree NSCC was working in partnership with those even "more inside" (i.e. the local church leaders and traditional chiefs) as preparations were made for the peace conference and as agreements were structured. More helpful for an understanding of the peace process is the web-work of relationships, local communities, churches and those involved. For example, Bill Lowrey, one of the facilitators for the Lokichokio, Wunlit and Waat conferences brought a helpful way of structuring the conversation, but the process could have happened without him. The funding has not been tied to personalities but rather the on-going peace and reconciliation process as it evolves.

4) Peace for War

The irony to some, of the church aiding the wider war process (through Southern unity) by working the People-to-People peace process, is lost on others clearly identified with the liberation struggle. This peace process serves unity. Then one can proceed with stronger negotiation at the table, such as the IGAD process. To what ends that unity is taken is seen by others as "up to the liberators." This is why for church leaders the story of the Israelites led out from slavery by Moses to the Promised Land is so powerful (Okumu and Garang, 2000). The NSCC Peace Desk also makes that point. The SPLA, the only authorized voice for southern Sudanese at the IGAD talks, is too narrow a link to all southerners. "Putting the south's house in order" to speak with one powerful voice from southern Sudan is needed there and that process is well-served by the People-to-People peace initiative (Deng, 2000). The SPLA seems somewhat mixed in response. On the one hand, the SPLA reaches for the honor of initiating the process (Kwaje, 2000) while providing support and security as needed. The prospect of renewed recruitment to prosecute the war now that the internal south-south conflicts are coming under control is an additional bonus but there is also unease at a process not directly under their control. Many at the grassroots, however, have no intention of again sending their children out to die.

Consideration of the practicalities of conflict helps to allay some unease about the concept of making peace so as to prosecute a more effective war with the north. The north has intervened repeatedly, arming and equipping various militias and military units in an effort to promote continued southern division (Deng, 1995; Medley, 2000). Any effort to reduce the impact of those divisions clearly contributes to healing. And even if southern Sudan was tomorrow a free and independent state of newly-liberated territory,

the conflict would continue with the spill-over effects of arms flows, refugees, and struggles over key natural resources such as oil and water (Verney, 1999). Thus, the NSCC People-to-People peace process should continue, even extending to the north so that lasting peace is built beyond the short-run goal of simply contributing to a better war outcome (Kiplagat, 2000).

5) *Civil Society*

The peace process is contributing to the creation of civil society through the formation of those structures like the peace council, mandated by the Wunlit Dinka-Nuer Covenant, and the detailed follow-up, such as the creation of some legal codes, border checkpoints, etc. This could function as an effective counterweight to an authoritarian military command in a post-conflict southern Sudan. As permanent control of large areas of southern Sudan is wrested from the Khartoum government, the shift from military control to civilian rule will be made, and more conflict will result if that transition cannot be smoothly made. Perhaps that is why great care was exercised to record the agreements rendered at these peace conferences. The Wunlit Dinka-Nuer Peace Documents and their inclusive process of adoption contrast markedly with the exclusive drafting of the SPLM constitution and the reported editing of the document by the top leadership of the SPLA without the concurrence of the population as expected by some.

6) *Expanded Base or Consolidated Gains?*

The People-to-People peace process has achieved much, surprised many and attracted a great deal of attention to itself. While the latter issue of publicity is discussed below, a key question now is in the strategy of expanded process or concentration on follow through with the many expectations now being raised. The many resolutions accompanying the Wunlit Dinka-Nuer Covenant speak to the establishment of an array of services and structure most of which are not yet in place. While a great deal has been accomplished in the way of improved relationships and shared use of the "toich" grazing and fishing sites, very little has been done regarding ox plowing, provision of bore wells, medical care, veterinary services and shared livestock and commodity markets, for example (c.f. Wunlit Dinka-Nuer Peace Documents, 1999, Section II "Resolutions on Reclaiming the Land and Rebuilding Relationships"). A variety of detailed arrangements for police, courts, appeal processes, border stations and administrative posts are also waiting to be fulfilled. Pleas for strengthening what has already been achieved are evident and yet NSCC appears not to have begun the process of proposal development to attract funding for these needs. This is regarded as a weakness of Wunlit and may imperil its sustainability (Mour Mour, 2000).

The NSCC seems committed to a strategy of expanding the base despite questions and pleas as above. An accompanying set of resolutions from the Wunlit peace conference does seem to indicate this as the preferred strategy. These resolutions raise the question, "Why do we want to extend this peace to the other side?" and then answers it, "We need peace for the entire South so that all can live in harmony" (Wunlit Dinka-Nuer Peace Documents, 1999). Yet, others, particularly in Eastern Equatoria, call for an even faster

pace for extending this peace (LoWilla, 2000). See the discussion on the Chukudum process and effects above.

This issue clearly is addressed to NSCC but is of an entirely different nature than the details and arrangements stemming from its institutional role in forging the peace conferences. Expecting NSCC to transform itself into a broker for development aid in the midst of extending the process for peace is expecting too much given its current staffing levels. Detailed analysis and discernment of roles, responsibilities and possibilities among NSCC and its partners are needed for a way forward on this important question. Toward that end, an evaluation of the NSCC People-to-People peace process is scheduled toward the end of 2000.

7) Publicity

Some observers believe that too much "hype" accompanied the process at Wunlit (Ashworth, 2000; Miller, 2000). The NSCC has responded, as noted above, in curtailing invitations and publicity for the forthcoming Nile East Bank Nilotic peace conference. It is thought that this publicity was responsible for too much of an "event" framework for viewing the peace conferences. Events are successful or failures. A process as dynamic as that intended by the People-to-People peace process ebbs and flows. Those organizing a process need to look to the strategic questions of whom to involve at what points, given a vision for what is possible in response to opportunities as they present themselves. The NSCC is well-placed to pursue such a task and seems engaged to that end but may need to cultivate more a sense of how to better utilize criticisms, pose dilemmas and take advantage of unexpected happenings such as the current Nuer political duels.

B. Church Conflicts

1) Self-Understanding and Role

The Biblical story of God leading a people out of slavery and oppression is readily claimed, as is the God of truth and justice. This God is one many have turned to in times of catastrophic loss, trauma, confusion and displacement, as is the reality in southern Sudan. The church understands itself to be the instrument of God in leading people, like the "good shepherd," to a land of promise. The God of love, mercy and reconciliation is less readily claimed, unless Southerners are involved. Both of these senses of struggling for truth and justice as well as mercy and peace have been evident in the People-to-People process and will continue to inform the church's contribution.

The peace process has effects for the reform of the church as well. If this peace process continues to develop momentum, the moving "down" to traditional sets of norms and legitimacy will have some effects in recasting the church more as co-partner with local chiefs and traditions than "transmitter" and vehicle to "the goods." The NSCC is conscious of its role in helping provide balance between traditional ways and modern

influences which is what they understand they bring to the relationship. This is why the People-to-People process is vital to a vision of sustainable development and the recovery of an authentic southern Sudanese future.

The church of the "New Sudan" is seen as broadly integrated, involving women, youth and elders and standing as a beacon to those in the midst of massive upheaval, and yet church leaders are viewed as "living in the past" with very poor attitudes toward women. This is true in many respects and yet changing. Paradox, inconsistency, gains and losses will continue to assert itself. And conflicts defined as something from the past to be dispensed with as soon as possible will continue if not transformed (see section following).

2) The Church and African Religion

African tradition is both a matter of pride and denigration, often by Africans themselves. Some conception of modernity is pursued by many, even with pride in their identity, that either works actively to remove "idols" and traditional religious practice or has a liberal and remote sort of tolerance to a perceived dying practice. But it is the traditional leaders with whom the church intuitively seeks to work as partners in this People-to-People peace process. Many observers believe that this dialogue with traditional chiefs and spiritual leaders be it for peace or other work should be given even greater emphasis (Svenson, 2000; Ashworth).

There is a mutual respect between church leaders and traditional leaders (so some say) which at its best seeks a balance between the two in working for peace. This respect can extend to the traditional people looking for help. For example, the church may extend aid to traditional practitioners overwhelmed with the task of removing the "pollution" of one using automatic weapons in the instant destruction of many as opposed to the killing of one by another with a spear (Ruun, 2000). Moreover, the church, among the Dinka, seems to have fostered a sense of a more accessible "Nhialic" (i.e. God). A great number of conversions to Christianity have occurred perhaps in some measure because the war in Sudan is a national war beyond the scope of a local "jak" (i.e. "spirit") to influence (Nikkel, 1993).

Is it possible to imagine the church may also be helped by some learning and openness to the rich covenantal traditions of African religion in such a way that the two become complementary, inclusive of the other and grow into a more mature and respectful relationship (see earlier section on African Cosmology and references to Bediako, 1995 and Magessa, 1997)? Consider the case of the Episcopal Church of Sudan (ECS) in both Bor and Yambio. In the former, the church in a very large way substituted for tradition when the people there had lost their land, cattle and confidence in their "jok" (i.e. "spirits") to protect them. As a result, the ECS supervised the burning of collections of traditional religious artifacts! Yet in Yambio, the ECS took the initiative in providing Christian young people with a clearer sense of identity in having the youth act out the roles of seers and diviners as a way of placing their faith in context (Miller, 2000). More

directly related to the church work of NSCC and its peace work, when it becomes known "in the bones" why the sacrifice of the white bull (i.e. Mabior Thon / Tu-bor) has power in sealing a covenant of peace, then maybe the church will be better able to comprehend and apply the lesson of the Cross in modeling Christian community. And at that point the conflict between the church and African Religion will have been transformed.

3) *Ecumenical Relationships*

The New Sudan Council of Churches is said by one observer to be "owned and operated by the ecumenical crowd." From my brief perspective, a great deal of energy does seem to be expended in simply keeping the host of partner agencies and church-related helping organizations happy and informed. To what degree this claim has merit and applies may be open to question but it is clearly the case that some tension exists between the various agenda brought under the heading of ecumenical relationships and NSCC. Apart from the Sudanese inter-church difficulties of working together, you have the same phenomenon outside as well. This can become manifest in trying to work at a common purpose with a divided church given outside funding with strings attached. For example, the relatively recent creation of Sudan Focal Point Africa by a largely European set of ecumenical organizations created some tension not so much in its purpose but in the manner of its organization. Nevertheless, this does appear to be a very helpful partner organization, now fully owned by NSCC and on which NSCC can call as needed.

While concerns over the timing, conditionality and core support have surfaced, funding has come forward to support a very broad-based movement for peace and reconciliation in southern Sudan. When NSCC has a clear need, church sources, particularly European, have provided funding and even volunteer personnel as needed. Nevertheless, not all sources contribute consistently, some prefer to switch funding from one activity to another, some are more flexible than others on disbursements and funding source regulations on timing, and other matters may not match developing opportunities on the ground. Moreover, having NSCC administrative costs deleted from requested funding for peace work and having a certain percentage of the requested amount deducted *for the funder's* administrative expenses has been particularly challenging (Phillippo, 2000). This changing constellation of possibilities and constraints, if persistent, can diminish the effectiveness of NSCC's critical shepherding role and highlights the need for detailed, strategic planning. (See Appendix 4 for a chart depicting those agencies providing funding or other support to the peace process.)

Yet, the often attached "strings" on funding assistance can hinder strategic planning. This is particularly true for external aid for the NSCC Peace Desk. Often, preferences for some type of work are indicated which must be honored if a continuing flow of funds is desired. Yet, "peace is not like agriculture." There are often unexpected opportunities that arise that must be addressed. It is not as predictable and ordered as other development work and thus less ear-marked funds are desired. Already in response to the Chukudum situation, for example, funds are coming that speak to certain levels of support and trust. A preference for being able to *not* have the "hands tied" is clear but will not soon come. There is still too much concern for results, transparency and

yesterday's priority to give up enough control for NSCC to move swiftly as opportunities present themselves (Deng, 2000).

4) The Church and southern Sudanese Military Units

The church and the movement for liberation are nearly inseparable, yet people see the SPLA (and the other southern military units) both as a liberation movement and as an oppressor at times. The militias and Government-supported units, however, such as Paulino Matiep's SSUA, are widely seen not as liberators at all but as oppressors. The 1997 Yei gathering did much to air these issues and begin a dialogue that continues. But the split view of liberators/oppressors continues for many in the church, particularly in Eastern Equatoria. The work at training chaplains for the military is seen by many as a partial corrective for this acknowledged problem of military abuse of local communities at times and in places.

C. African Tradition and southern Sudanese Military Units

An incident occurring during the Nuer-Dinka Loki Accord meetings of June 1998 in Lokichokio, Kenya, is vividly recorded, relating to the issue again of leadership. In the current conflicts, what role, if any, is played by indigenous cultural and religious tradition? The dialogue at Lokichokio had reached a point where both the Nuer and Dinka chiefs and church leaders present had indicated a responsibility for the conflict as well as for peace, irrespective of the two principal leaders (at that time, Riek Machar of SSIM/A and John Garang of SPLM/A). Then the Rt. Rev. Nathaniel Garang of the Episcopal Church of Sudan spoke of the chair of leadership. The "chair seeks out the leader when all is well in the community. But in this conflict people are fighting for the chair." Then Rt. Rev. Garang reportedly picked up a large wooden chair holding it over his head and cried out, "Who will help me with this burden? Who will lift the load from me?" At that point, the oldest Nuer chief present, William Ruaei, leaped up and helped the Rt. Rev. Garang to slowly return the chair to the floor amidst the clapping and joyous shouts of the other Nuer and Dinka leaders present (Lowrey, 1998). An isolated but dramatic break in a meeting or a metaphorical expression of reclaiming the leadership norms from a tradition too long ignored? As judged by the work and activity following and leading on to the Wunlit peace conference, clearly the latter! The power of tradition, just out of sight, present but unexpressed until allowed and focused, can redirect behavior, assume responsibility and work to restore right relationships.

A key factor for the military is the continuous recruitment of troops to carry on the struggle. For the first time at Wunlit, the traditional prerogative of the chiefs to sanction such conflict was aired. It was readily acknowledged that the Dinka-Nuer conflicts were not sought and imposed on them by political and military leaders. Yet personal complicity and responsibility for these conflicts was also acknowledged. Assertions of responsibility returned to traditional norms were clearly given to the leaders of all military units as a rebuke and reminder (Ruun and Deng, 2000).

This reminder of the link between chiefs and recruitment is a matter of pain to some traditional chiefs. Earlier in the 1980s, many traditional chiefs were dismissed by the SPLA to promote the army's control over local communities for provisions and recruits (Ruun and Deng, 2000). Thus, the conflict of the various southern military units with these cultural traditions is yet another manifestation of how deep this conflict runs and what the NSCC peace process continues to uncover.

D. Replicability

Is the People-to-People peace process of the New Sudan Council of Churches replicable elsewhere? Perhaps. I would highlight the following generalities. If a context could be found where the following items apply, then the experience with this process may be particularly instructive. Consider these conditions:

- several conflict systems present and interrelated,
- factional fighting has rendered the leadership seemingly indifferent to local people's suffering,
- this fighting serves as a distraction from efforts to address a wider conflict (like the Sudanese civil war),
- a broadly representative body (like the NSCC) can make a difference ,
- underlying cultural tradition and cosmology, previously unrecognized, can make a significant contribution to a sustainable peace.

Some observers, asked to think of a similar conflict in the world, offered up the example of East Timor, which upon its transition to a post-colonial realm following Portuguese colonialism, was invaded by Indonesia and another "colonialism" imposed. Given East Timor's recent conflicts before and after the UN-sponsored referendum, it was suggested that for Sudan forces be first separated, by international peacekeepers if necessary, with a referendum for self-determination to follow (Kwaje, 2000). The IGAD Declaration of Principles and the continuing rounds of negotiation could be construed as heading in just such a direction.

E. Final Thoughts and Questions

There is a richness and wonder to this on-going story of the People-to-People process. Most directly addressing the factional fighting among various southern ethnic communities by militias and military units and complicated by the Sudanese civil war, this peace process is connected to a range of other conflicts, very much entangled in one another. Church conflicts, attempting to stand as an African ecumenical voice in the face of northern ecumenical power and the ongoing tension of speaking peace while entwined with a military presence for the liberation of southern Sudan all greatly complicate the peace process. And finally beneath it all, is the struggle of Africa to speak with integrity and authenticity from the strength of its tradition and religious heritage. This latter aspect is what is so energizing to many. The People-to-People peace process has tapped this

source and is drawing on its power. In many ways, this story is a microcosm of the African story, played out over the centuries as various powers, political or religious, seek to impose their hegemony over the indigenous culture and cosmology. A conflict seemingly of "foreign" or "domestic" values, or possibly, of some new hybrid form which this peace process in southern Sudan may point to. Such a hybrid form (i.e. church-traditional cooperation as modeled particularly in the Lokichokio, Wunlit and Waat peace conferences) would take the shape of a complementary institutional birthing of governance structures and the provision of health, education, markets and other development investment much as envisioned in the Wunlit Dinka-Nuer Peace Documents. One is pushed to envision the appropriate stance for supportive observers. Is it one of accompaniment and discernment? To what degree are we as outsiders part of the conflict? How is support best presented? And how is criticism or compliment best offered? Continuing dialogue with an emphasis on listening first is clearly needed.

And finally, "what criteria (do) people use to 'know' whether something helped or worsened conflict in their areas," the "brief for case study writers" asks. This is an interesting, even unexpected question. Paul McDermott of the United State Agency for International Development, who has been connected with the NSCC peace process and eager to work with development projects in southern Sudan, was quite taken aback at this question. After a brief period of stunned silence he replied, "I don't know how I know!" For other Sudanese connected with the People-to-People process, this question seemed almost silly, the sort of thing a dutiful western researcher would be sure to ask! The question betrays the sort of worldview from which the questioner comes. To the Sudanese, particularly those clearly in touch with local on-the-ground realities, to "know" whether something is "good" is to bring reference immediately to one's cosmological framework and the pointers there, if allowed expression, are very clear (e.g. "Nhialic does not want us to kill each other."). Something is "known" to be right, true and beautiful if relationships are restored, restitution made, celebration joyously made in song, dance and poetry and ritual sacrifice made. It is "known" to be good if the problem is re-membered, then remembered and applied later. And this knowledge is not held by a few but accessible to all in the telling, singing and dancing. That will surely be the legacy of this People-to-People peace story.

Appendix 1

Isaiah 18: 1-7 (RSV)

Ah, land of whirring wings,
Which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia;
Which sends ambassadors by the Nile, in vessels of papyrus upon the waters!
Go, you swift messengers, to a nation, tall and smooth,
To a people feared near and far,
a nation mighty and conquering, whose land the rivers divide.

All you inhabitants of the world, you who dwell on the earth,
when a signal is raised on the mountains, look!
When a trumpet is blown, hear! For thus the LORD said to me:
"I will quietly look from my dwelling like clear heat in sunshine,
like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest."

For before the harvest, when the blossom is over,
and the flower becomes a ripening grape,
he will cut off the shoots with pruning hooks,
and the spreading branches he will hew away.
They shall all of them be left to the birds of prey of the mountains,
and to the beasts of the earth.
And the birds of prey will summer upon them, and all the beasts of the earth will
winter upon them.

At that time gifts will be brought to the LORD of hosts
from a people tall and smooth,
from a people feared near and far,
a nation mighty and conquering,
whose land the rivers divide, to Mount Zion, the place of the name of the LORD
of hosts.

Appendix 2

Poem by Minyiel Row as quoted in (Deng, 1995)

> When I lie awake at night and I search my heart on what has destroyed the land,
> I conclude that the land has become overcrowded with men of power …
> The Ngok look as though they were all begotten by the giraffe;
> Ours is a land in which all the people are equally tall;
> Even among the giraffes, some are taller than others.
> What kind of fire is this that does not die?
> When you find a fire refusing to die and sending smoke to the sky,
> There must be someone keeping the wood burning;
> There must be someone fanning the fire.
> Is it true, O, is it true?
> Are you people of Abyei creating confusion again?
> With some men turning themselves into chameleons.

Appendix 3

"Death Has Come," a four-verse and chorus Dinka hymn by Mary Alueel Garang. Verse 1 and Chorus as recorded in <u>Dinka Christianity</u> by Marc Nikkel, 1993, follows.

    1)   Death has come to reveal the faith;
           It has begun with us,
           And it will end with us.
           O person who fears death, do not fear death.
           It only means that one will disappear from the earth.
           Who is there who can save his life
           And deny death?
           We who live in the world, we are mere sojourners upon the earth, as the Lord has said:
           Let us serve the truth.
           Upon the earth
           There is no man we can call our Father.
           We abide together equally
           in unity as brothers.
           God did not create us to be the slaves
           Of mere mortals like ourselves.
           This cannot happen upon the earth!

    Chorus:
           We are only the windblown dust
           Rising for the black soil;
           We have no one among us to save our souls.
           We are blind and deaf within our hearts;
           And have rejected the words,
           The words spoken by our Saviour,
           Are wonderful words!
           The "jok"[10] of deception
           Has held us back from the light.

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[10] "Jok" can be rendered in English as "spirit."

Appendix 4

Timeline of Major Events
<u>**New Sudan Council of Church's People-to-People Peace Process**</u>

- 1820-1881   Turco-Egyptian period; Viceroy of Egypt, Muhammad Ali Pasha, seeks to extend his control and exploitation of southern Sudan by an invasion from the north begun in 1820.
- 1881-1898   The Mahdist Revolution and Mahdist state, the beginning of Sudanese nationality, led by Muhammad Ahmad ibn 'Abdallah, the Mahdi.
- 1899-1955   Anglo-Egyptian Condominium, ostensibly the joint colonial administration but essentially British in most respects.
- 1920s   Indirect rule and the emergence of separate development for the south (i.e. essentially no development investment as opposed to some in the north – a policy of separate but benign neglect).
- In this same era, the first Christian missionaries and anthropologists began to arrive in southern Sudan. While the anthropologists studied, the missionaries built the first churches, clinics and schools.
- 1946   British commitment to independence and the abandonment of the southern development "policy."
- 1947, and later confirmed in 1953   Agreement on the partition of southern Sudan without any southern Sudanese representatives with independence to come by 1956.
- 1955   The Torit Mutiny; southern Sudanese soldiers rebel at orders to relocate to the North. The Sudanese civil war begins.
- January 1, 1956   Sudan becomes an independent state.
- 1964   Foreign missionaries expelled from Sudan.
- 1972   The Addis Ababa Accord (AAA) ends the first phase of the civil war. Regional government introduced.
- 1980   Oil discovered in southern Sudan.
- 1983   The civil war erupts again.
     May – The Bor Mutiny.
     June – Redivision of the southern political jurisdictions abrogates AAA.
     July – The Sudan People's Liberation Movement (the political wing) and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) formed under the command of Col. John Garang.
     September – The imposition of "sharia" throughout the whole of Sudan.
- 1989   Formation of the New Sudan Council of Churches.
- 1991   Internal divisions within the SPLA lead to "interfactional fighting" which resulted in widespread deaths, abductions, burnings, looting, theft of stock and the displacement of large numbers of southern Sudanese.
- 1991 – 1992   Church-facilitated meetings with the leadership of the factions set in the context of the Abuja talks between the Government of Sudan and the SPLA, with little result.

- 1994 Akobo peace gathering sponsored by the Presbyterian Church of Sudan.
- 1994 Initiation of a peace process involving the Government of Sudan and the SPLA, under the sponsorship of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, a regional grouping of states in East Africa.
- 1996 The initiation of "Peace from Within" by the Government of Sudan, resulting in a peace agreement with Riek Machar of the UDSF.
- 1997 Peace Desk established at NSCC and SPLA successful with large military advances resulting in the control of large areas of new territory under the SPLA.
  July – Dialogue between NSCC and SPLA at Yei.
- 1998 Lokichoko, Kenya, Peace gathering of chiefs and church leaders among the Dinka and Nuer to test possibilities for a more broad-based peace conference.
- 1999, March West Bank Nilotic people's Peace Conference at Wunlit between the Dinka and Nuer.
- 1999, June Women's Peace Workshop, Lokichokio, Kenya.
- 1999, August Chukudum Covenant of Peace and Reconciliation.
- 1999, August Nuer military agreement.
- 1999, September The Wunlit-ordained first Peace Council Meeting in Yirol.
- 1999, November Waat Lou Nuer Covenant.
- 2000, May East Bank Nilotic people's Peace Conference at Liliir between the Anyuak, Dinka, Jie, Kachipo, Murle and Nuer.

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