

RESPONSE FORM



Aid to the Church in Need

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BLOCK LETTERS PLEASE

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Sr/Rev:.....

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We enclose \$..... to support the work of the Church in Sudan.

I enclose a cheque/money order payable to Aid to the Church in Need

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Our new book "Violence Against Christians in the Year 2003" will be sent out to all those who give a donation of \$20 or more and tick this box.

"Solidarity with...our persecuted brothers and sisters is a matter of honour." These words by ACN founder Fr Werenfried show the significance of this latest chronicle of atrocities against Christians in dozens of countries – such as the Sudan and China. Complete with key statistics about the Church and the suffering faithful, the book is a tribute to those who endure the Way of the Cross in the 21st century.



Paperback: 235 pages: 21cm x 15cm (illustrated)

Please tick the box above if you would like to receive the book.

WAU: CARNAGE AND CHRISTIAN COURAGE

The look on little Andrew's face said it all – he had had enough. Dressed in dusty rags, the five-year-old was too weak to stand for long. And yet a smile flashed across his face as soon as he saw his priest.

Fr Gabriel said: "You see, there is an amazing bond of trust between the Church and the people."

Priests and religious – funded by ACN - have been among the only ones to stay behind to help the stricken people of this town – Wau, in the south west of Sudan. The town and the surrounding area has witnessed some of the worst fighting between the Government of Sudan and the rebels – the Sudanese People's Liberation Army. More than a million people have died and hundreds of thousands more have fled north.

Mujahedin Islamic fighters used to arrive in trains, shoot people at random and then return north at dusk. We were told that at various times seven out of every 10 people in the area were soldiers attached to the military in some way. Those who could, fled north and the likes of little Andrew, his family and friends have struggled to fend for themselves. Risking death and fatal illness, priests like Fr Gabriel have given their lives to share in the people's pain and give them hope. They have been a constant presence in little Andrew's camp, a tribal village of grass huts on the edge of Wau.

Jack Deng Adam, the chief of the camp, told us: "The priest is always with us. We knew nothing about Christianity until he came and thanks to him the Church now represents the hope of the camp." He had a special word of thanks for ACN and the benefactors: "Your help has come from afar but it is so important. We know that though you are a long way from us you are one with us in Christ."

Aid to the Church in Need is committed to doing more to help the Church in the Sudan. The diocese of Wau is organising teams of people to go out and teach the inhabitants of the tribal villages basic skills lost by war – cooking, sewing, cultivating crops and selling produce in the market.

Programmes to improve the water supply in this frequently desolate area are considered a key priority by the Bishop of Wau, the Rt Rev Rudolf Deng.

"The people are thirsty," he said. "They are thirsty for help and they come to the Church because we have suffered with them. They look to us for guidance and we are desperately trying to give them what they need."



Too weak to stand for long: Little Andrew with Fr Gabriel



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Sudan: A Cry for hope from the Desert

Aid to the Church in Need Sudan Report: 2004

THE Sudan has become a nation of martyrs - such is the extraordinary faith of a people traumatised by relentless war.

The conflict has plagued the sub-Saharan African country for most of the past half-century. Almost entire communities have been decimated in a civil war, whose worst casualties have been innocent lives caught in the middle.

More than two million people have died in the last 20 years and a further five million have become refugees in their own country. They had no option but to flee their homes, which had become ensnared by the threat of conflict, famine and disease.

At the heart of the pain and misery lies the persecution of the Catholic faithful. Already pulverised by war, they are still harassed and abandoned with little to survive on.

For years, the bishops of the Sudan have pleaded for help as the people endure the Way of the Cross – bowed down by intolerance and desperate poverty.

And yet the bishops say their cries have been left largely unanswered by the very people in the West who can help.

Regional conflicts continue to flare up but hopes grow of a lasting peace. Meanwhile, the Christian communities keep faith as they seek a helping hand to rebuild their lives.

This eye-witness account reveals the situation facing Christians in and around the capital, Khartoum – and also further south as far as the town of Wau.



"O Lord, hear my prayer": Schoolchildren at Jabal Auliya, south of Khartoum. Picture: A.Polec

PRAYING FOR DELIVERANCE

“Father, Father, they are destroying our homes – what should we do?”

Dressed in rags and covered in dust, the bare-footed children take their priest by the hand and lead him into the parish centre.

“Let’s pray,” they shout in a voice of shrill defiance. And so, here we are standing in the baking hot African sun, saying the “Our Father” and the “Hail Mary” surrounded by a group of very dusty children, dressed in no more than rags.

The sound of the familiar prayers ushers forth a steadily increasing stream of people, praying for deliverance, praying for peace.

Despite appearances, this is a day like any other in this shanty town on the edge of Khartoum, the capital of Africa’s largest country, Sudan.

The city’s population has, over the past 15 years or more, exploded as droves of people – mostly Christians – have migrated north to escape the fighting.

And yet, unable to find homes of their own, they have had to make do with mud huts and

struggle from day to day lacking the most basic needs.

This is home to a people reliant on water of often suspect quality carried in carts by ailing donkeys, which are so skinny and bony they sometimes keel over in the heat.

Acting in the name of so-called “city-planning”, the government of President Umar al-Bashir has taken to arbitrary demolition of homes and all without providing alternative places to live.

The many parish centres, fenced-in compounds consisting of a mud hut chapel and school, are a particular target for the demolition teams.

Again and again entire communities have encamped inside the parish centres to stop them from being demolished.

Outside one, evidence of a bulldozer’s demolition job was in evidence right up to the boundary of the parish centre.

Inside, we could see groups of people – some praying the rosary, others in a catechesis class and still more sewing brightly-coloured traditional African garments.

The assistant parish priest, Fr John, said: “The parish centre means everything to the people here. It is the one place where we can come together and draw strength from one another.”

And yet, the persecution continues. As we left, we saw in the distance a bulldozer laying waste to a Christian cemetery. Even in death, there is no guarantee of peace for the displaced people of Sudan.

◀ **An indestructible faith:** Youngsters whose homes were destroyed that morning pray in their mud chapel with their parish priest, Fr Charles: St Mukusa’s parish centre, Dar El Naim displacement camp, Khartoum.



SUDAN: A CHURCH OF MARTYRS

Softly-spoken, Michelle’s words gave no hint of the gritty determination deep within her.

I talked to her, exhausted and hungry, as she came into the displacement camp parish centre to collect her two children, Mary, five, and two-year-old William. She had completed a four-hour journey home from the centre of Khartoum, where she works as a cook and cleaner in Arabic houses.

Michelle explained how her employers and the city authorities tempt her with a better job, more food, a new home and so much more, on condition she converts to Islam. Painfully thin, she and her children have barely enough to live on. They rely on help provided by charities and the Church. And yet she refuses to give in. “Christ is the only way,” she said.

Michelle’s story is repeated across Sudan as the regime mounts a campaign of intimidation to suppress Christianity and draw converts to Islam.

One youngster, James, told me that the teachers at the government-run school he attends regularly beat him with a stick for insisting on missing a class to go to Sunday Mass. And yet he is undaunted: “I am a Christian. It is my duty to go to Church and nobody has the right to take that away from me.”



Thirsting for God: Michelle with children Mary and William is under pressure to convert to Islam. She said: “It is better to live on nothing but this water and remain a christian, than to abandon my faith and live a lie.”

A THRIVING FAITHFUL

THE Church in Sudan is booming despite terrible suffering. Statistics show that in the space of barely 40 years, the number of Catholics has mushroomed from about 900,000 to nearly five million.

Adult catechetical courses last up to three years to ensure people are joining the Church for the right reasons, and yet every year thousands are baptised in dioceses across the country. There are many vocations among the Sudanese faithful.

Fr Dingi, Rector of St Paul’s Major Seminary, Khartoum, said: “The seminary is part of a Church that is really growing in Sudan. Last year, we had 17 ordinations and yet only 30 years ago, when I became a priest there were virtually none.”

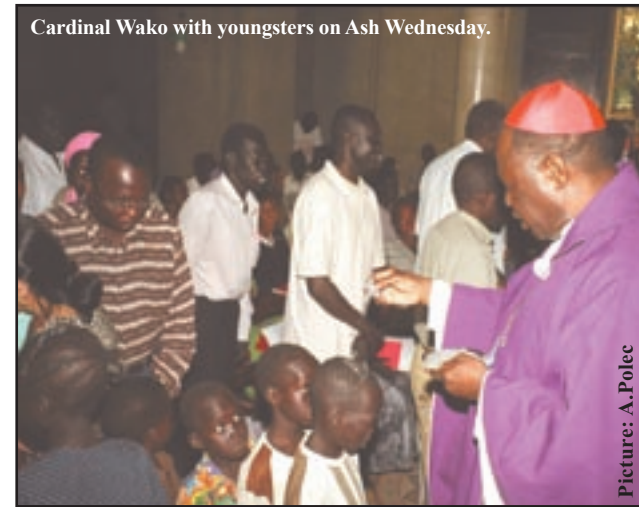
Onesimo, 26, a second year seminarian, said: “Most of our people are really traumatised by the war - particularly by the injustice of it all. Most of them are living below the basic needs of the

country. They are very poor. Even if we cannot help them materially, we can bring them closer to a sense of inner peace thanks to the saving work of God.”

ACN has given vital help for the seminary and indeed to catechetical programmes all across Sudan. The prayer of the faithful is that this support may continue for many years to come.

Prayer-poem by Cardinal Gabriel Zubeir Wako, the Archbishop of Khartoum:

*Lord, things are getting worse.
After a while
We shall be unable
To say the prayer
you taught us.
We are forgetting
how to forgive.
As a consequence
the tomb you left empty
Is getting full
Of corpses.
Stand in out midst
And say:
PEACE BE WITH YOU.
For no one but you
Can pronounce it
correct now.
(Easter 1986)*



RELIGIOUS RIGHTS ABUSES: THE FACTS

- Christian women face harsh punishment for breach of Islamic Sharia law even though as non-Muslims they should be exempt.
 - They are stoned to death for allegations of adultery
 - They are jailed for claims of alcohol possession or production
 - They are denied jobs because of their sex
 - They are whipped for failing to cover their legs and heads in public
- At work and government schools, Christians are forbidden to attend Sunday Mass. If they do, they face the sack or physical punishment.
- Permits to build churches are refused. Reports revealed that the last was issued in the mid 1970s. Churches without permits are liable for immediate demolition.
- Missionaries who help displaced people in camps are interrogated and are forced to leave the country
- Christian education is not taught in most government schools, meaning Christians are forced to study Islam
- Christians are sacked from public service jobs – eg Police and Judiciary – because of their religion
- Visas for Christians from abroad are refused.