

## **Bishop Gassis Relief and Rescue Foundation (BGRRF)**

**H. E. Macram Max Gassis**

### **Advocacy Message**

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On 5th June 2011, fighting broke out between the SAF (Sudan Armed Forces) and SPLA-N in the Nuba Mountains in Southern Kordofan, Sudan. Since 2011, artillery shelling, targeted attacks on population groups, attacks on UN and Church property, and threats to UN and INGOs have occurred. The situation is becoming tragic by the day and, if ignored, it will be more chronic.

The purpose of our visit is to offer insight on the tragedy in the Nuba Mountains, of the entire Nuba ethnic people, who are not only being deprived of their dignity, expressed in their human rights, but have been ignored in this hidden and forgotten conflict, particularly due to the present tragic situation in the Middle East. We also wish to highlight the plight of the people of Abyei, Sudan.

The church did not cease and will not cease to speak against the agony of peoples, against suffering that is physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual and moral. We are obliged as a human family to reach out for those who are deprived of their dignity and humanity. Hunger, disease, insecurity, and above all, silence in the face of evils that are killing innocent people, particularly children, women and elderly, who are maimed, rendered homeless and killed due to aerial bombardment which has become the order of the day.

The Abyei area lives in limbo and the church reaches out to supply clean water and food to local communities. The presence of the church in Abyei is a beacon of hope, where we witness peaceful co-existence between Dinka and Nuer communities. The church is not a government, but we try to offer material and spiritual assistance within our capabilities, such as through our hospital in Turalei, and we assure the international community that our voices on behalf of the suffering and desperate populations will continue loud and clear.

Our appeal to our friends is to request that serious steps be taken to ensure that aerial bombing stops. I have called for this since 2011, given that this indiscriminate bombardment targets civilians. I continue to call for immediate action to ensure that the rights of the Nuba people are respected and to encourage the adoption of measures and peaceful mechanisms to reduce and prevent high levels of conflict.

Unfortunately we again bring to your attention the use of chemical bombs. Victims of chemical bombs were brought to our hospital in the Nuba Mountains. Our personnel have witnessed what they state are the undeniable symptoms of exposure to organic phosphate or nerve gas. Amnesty International reports that Sudanese government forces have used chemical weapons on at least 30 occasions since January 2016. Recently, members of the British House of Lords (Lord Alton, Baroness Kinnock, Baroness Cox & Sir Henry Bellingham) denounced the use of chemical weapons. In May 2014 our hospital was bombed; in March 2015 our primary school and Teacher Training Institute were bombed. Is there no way to stop such indiscriminate bombing? We are alarmed.

It is also alarming to know that Europe has moved ahead, partnered with and supplies with high-tech surveillance and registration equipment, those who use chemical weapons, conduct indiscriminate aerial bombardment, starve their population, refuse life-saving medicines reaching the Nuba population, in order to stem the flow of refugees from Africa. The grants to Sudan by Germany and by the EU would save the Nuba from starvation, supply the hospital with drugs against measles that killed, and vaccinate our children! It is my belief that what was given to stem the movement of refugees to Europe will definitely be used to fuel the war in the Nuba Mountains, in Blue Nile, and in Darfur.

We as the diocese that caters to the needs of the Nuba people, of the Dinka and Nuer of Abyei and Twic State look forward to your support to bring to a halt to the suffering of the innocent people through your joining hands with us and peoples of goodwill to stop aerial bombardment, opening land and aerial corridors for supplies, and coaching the belligerent parties to sit and dialogue in a civilized way to end this fratricidal killing.