

# SOUTH SUDAN: A COUNTRY FACING A NEW REVOLUTION

*A pamphlet by John Sunday Martin (May 30, 2016)*

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*"The Revolution is all about introducing positive change. Positive change cannot be introduced in a nation by compromised individuals. Therefore, the New Revolution will start with ideological changes aimed at shifting us away from selfishness towards a clearer sense of nationalism"*

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## INTRODUCTION

We are in the era of revolution. This era begins with changes in our individual attitudes toward our nation. Strong positive feelings towards our nation influence our actions. They compel us to do good things for our nation, both as individuals and as a collective.

The era of liberation is over. We cannot continue to talk of liberation struggles, because liberation carries with it certain ideologies which are unhelpful for national unity and peaceful coexistence. Liberation ideology promotes negative doctrines of sectarianism along ethnic, religious and political divides. Even when liberation is achieved, unity and reconciliation often remain unrealized because of the negative legacy of the word *Liberation*.

Many people have been complaining for a long time in our society. But we have not been willing to listen to their grievances. There was no intention to find solutions to their problems. So what once was just their problem, has become a national disaster. When things are not going well, people will be unhappy. When people are unhappy, they will become rebellious. They will strive to reclaim their lost happiness, and that is the foundation of revolution in society. And so it has been in our nation to date. It is unwise to blame the rebels in our society. It is far wiser to find solutions to the problems that gave rise to their rebellion. Because no person ever rebels without an unbearable situation that pushes them towards rebellion.

However, we cannot continue to call any rebellion a Liberation Struggle. The struggle for liberation is over. We are now in the *era of revolution*. It is the struggle of the people for meaningful change to improve their lives. To date, most south Sudanese are unhappy with governance in South Sudan under SPLM. Their mismanagement has sparked an outcry from

every community. We are all looking forward to our salvation from the SPLM regime.

The discontent amongst the people of South Sudan is because of a lack of development and the neglect of democratic principles. These were the main reasons behind every struggle between the North and the South over the decades. Now, that we finally have our independence, they remain the main reason for struggle between us, the South Sudanese people, against the SPLM regime. A regime which has caused the death and suffering of many innocent souls.

The lack of democratic principles, the lack of development, the neglect of service delivery and the general hardship we are facing can be described as problems of our very own making. The real problem of South Sudan is our self-serving individualism. This individualism has manifested itself in political corruption. Power is misused by individuals and cadres of the ruling SPLM. The SPLM has become a political organization for the illegitimate private gain of party members. Consequently, the SPLM as an organization has consistently undermined democratic principles and failed to deliver services and social justice to the public.

Our self-serving and immoral ideologies are at the root of our national problems. They promote tribalism and a lack of patriotism. National unity, democratic reform and sustainable socio-economic development are required to rescue South Sudan from factionalism and an ethnocentric system of governance on a regional basis. There is a need for revolution. A *social revolution* that will target the immoral ideologies have become the problem of our nation.

## PART 1 – THE SPIRIT OF TRIBALISM

The social revolution must start by targeting the *Spirit of Tribalism*; the behaviors and attitudes that compel a person to favour their tribe over their social group and their country. The Spirit of Tribalism corrupts our moral conscience. It ingrains in us an ideology that limits our reasoning to only tribal considerations, and how these might be used to benefit the individual. It produces negative behavior and attitudes toward other ethnicities within society. It undermines the spirit of unity and the prospect of peaceful coexistence.

Ethnocentrism has made it difficult for us South Sudanese to coexist anywhere without tension. The tension amongst South Sudanese is spreading faster than ever before, despite the increased rate of inter-tribal marriages and inter-regional settlement that followed the massive internal displacement caused by the Liberation War.

Some people attribute the increased ethnic tensions in South Sudan to the behaviors of a certain group of people. The truth of the matter is that our behavior is not the result of tribalism. On the contrary, tribalism is the result of our individual behavior, attitudes and rationalizations.

It is clear that South Sudanese are more likely to live in peace and unity with foreign nationals, within South Sudan, than they are with fellow South Sudanese from other tribes. This is because of tribalism. The questions we need to ask ourselves are:

- *How did tribalism take root in our society?*
- *What is causing tribalism to spread so quickly in our nation?*

The most plausible answer for both questions are the many tragic historic events that occurred during the Liberation War. These tragedies were never addressed through truth, justice, and reconciliation mechanisms.

Tribalism was not evident in the early days of Sudan People's Liberation Army/ Movement (SPLA/M). It was not until 1991, with the internal leadership crisis of the SPLA/M, that South Sudanese began openly dividing along tribal lines and forming exclusionary inter-tribal alliances. The 1991 leadership crisis became a struggle for tribal supremacy between Dinkas and Nuers. Its legacy continues to fuel the tribal tensions that have so victimized the South Sudanese people.

The current Spirit of Tribalism in our society can be attributed to the legacy of SPLA/M. From the outset, the SPLA/M favored political propaganda and overt racism instead of a narrative of nationalist politics. The propaganda machine painted a vivid picture of a struggle between Muslims and Christians or between Arabs and Africans. The SPLA/M's internal indoctrination misused the word Liberation. In the process, for its cadres and supporters, Liberation became widely understood as liberation from Arab-Islamists. This made unity and reconciliation with the North improbable, following signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA).

Due to the SPLA/M's political propaganda and misuse of the word *Liberation*, many South Sudanese, and in particular SPLM members and supporters, developed a deep hatred towards the Arab-Islamists. This hatred towards Arabs-Islamists manifested in the use of word *Moharais*, which means "*blood agent of the Arabs-Islamist Government in Khartoum.*" During the Liberation War, if you were not supportive of the SPLM/A, you risked being branded a *Moharais*. Whether you worked for the Khartoum regime or were a neutral, whether there was evidence or pure speculation, you would be subjected to torture and likely summarily executed.

During the 1991 leadership struggle between Dr Riek Machar and Dr John Garang, the supporters of Dr Riek Machar, which consisted mainly of his tribesmen, the Nuers, were considered to be Moharaiseen. This developed a deep tribal enmity between the Dinkas and Nuers. It broadened over time to other tribes. Overcoming this enmity will take time and sacrifice.

It must be overcome in order to bring unity and reconciliation between South Sudan's 64 tribes.

The SPLA/M's deep rooted hatred against Arab-Islamists, as well as against those South Sudanese considered to be against the principles of the SPLA/M and its leadership, developed into Tribalism; more so, as the SPLA/M failed to make any meaningful impact with its revolutionary ideology in the hearts and minds of the people. The failure of the SPLA/M to implant ideology of revolution amongst even its own members and supporters is the foundation of the problems of South Sudan to date. It will continue to be the problem of South Sudanese, until the ideology of revolution is transplanted into the heart and minds of the South Sudanese people.

Reform has always been at the core of the National Revolution that South Sudanese have consistently demanded. Reform remains to be seen as essential for national integration, peaceful coexistence and socio-economic development. One can say that the politics of propaganda is what we are suffering from. It has focused the SPLA/M ideologically on dismantling the Khartoum regime, while neglecting the case for reform.

When people talk of *Liberation* or *Regime Change* instead of Revolution, the job of building good governance and establishing the rule of law, which are the trademark of democracy, remain untouched. Democracy is functionalized by revolution. Thus, the SPLA/M, since its establishment as a guerrilla force, through to its ascent into power after the CPA, has never experienced the *Spirit of Revolution* that the nation has been longing for. The SPLA/M has never bought into the ideological change of minds and attitudes that demands a shift from principles of power and domination over others. It remained exposed to the resulting corruption that works to undermine individual and collective rights and freedoms.

Because of the lack of a revolutionary ideology amongst the cadres of the SPLM/A, it was unable to bring about meaningful reform in the nation. Instead, the SPLM/A redirected its narrative of racial discrimination away

from Arab-Islamists and towards tribal discrimination in South Sudan. It also inherited the authoritarian rule of the Khartoum regime. Taken together, systematic discrimination and authoritarianism have driven the Republic of South Sudan into the ethnocentric sectarianism we see today.

The South Sudanese people have developed a deep *Spirit of Hatred* towards other ethnic groups. We are quick to blame other tribes for every problem the nation is experiencing, whilst absolving our own tribe of any blame. This is the spirit of tribal dominance. It is the foundation of nepotism in the public sector. It is the reason why we see some tribes over-represented in government and the civil service, while others are under-represented. Because of tribalism, the real ideal of employment based on individual merit is fast disappearing in South Sudan. In our country, you can only get a decent position in the civil service if you are known by some influential individuals within the structure of the government. In this regard, tribal affiliation plays an increasingly central role.

We are morally corrupted by our tribalism. We no longer care whether a person is competent for the position and, as is required by the nation, capable of delivering services to the highest standard. All we care about is that the position is occupied by someone from our own tribe. Even if we do not benefit, we still prefer that position be given to someone from our tribe. All that we enjoy is the name our tribe and nothing else, to the detriment of service delivery and development.

Tribalism has taken deep root in the nation. Almost every national political cause in South Sudan stubbornly refuses to take heed of the national interest. Each revolves around sectarianism. As a result, many innocents have been tortured or killed, solely on the basis of their tribe. This can be traced from the start of the leadership crisis in 1991 between Dr Riek Machar and Dr John Garang. It can be followed, through the historical record of persistent power struggles in South Sudan, right up to the crisis between Dr Riek Machar and Salva Kiir in 2013.



Associating politics with tribalism is dangerous. Whenever there is political crisis, some tribes will become victims. Their experiences will embed bitter memories. Their need for retribution will undermine the cause of reconciliation and national unity. It may even be a culturally driven imperative for some of our ethnic groups.

But despite recent experiences, we are unable to learn. We continue to allow ourselves to be used by self-serving and power hungry politicians, for their own goals. Meanwhile, it is we, the ordinary citizens that are suffering and dying, while those politicians and their families are scoring their political and economic goals and enjoying the benefits. We are, to some extent, unable to understand that tribalism is the greatest enemy of the South Sudanese nation. It has pushed the nation to the edge of destruction.

This is because most of us are morally corrupted by tribalism. We cannot even realise that we are tribal in our attitudes and actions. Tribalism is deep inside us. Those who are denouncing tribalism in South Sudan today are the same people who are quick to mobilize tribalism in the fight against tribalism. And so, tribalism is growing faster in South Sudan than ever before. If a solution is not found quickly, then our nation may disintegrate into ethnocentric factionalism and cease to exist.

It is painful to see our national leaders, who are best placed to eradicate tribalism, becoming instruments of tribalism. They choose to promote tribalism, in their own communities and throughout the nation at large, simply to reach their political and economic goals. They ignore the danger of this doctrine to national unity and the peaceful coexistence of successive generations of South Sudanese.

A national position is not a tribal position. A national leader is not the making of a tribe, but is the making of a nation. To use tribalism to acquire or sustain oneself in a national position is a dangerous political game. The tribe that made you into a national leader, will have some feelings of ownership over the nation. They will come to consider other tribes as

inferior because of *your* position. They will develop an ideology of tribal domination, because the tribe that put you there will interfere in every aspect of your activities. They will come to believe that they own you and the office you hold. They will expect you to be there for them and robotically respond to the fulfilment of their interests. And as you strain to sustain yourself in office, you will start to become increasingly tribal too. The danger of becoming tribal while holding public office is that the other tribes will begin to feel marginalized. This sense of marginalization will inevitably lead to a national crisis.

We cannot use tribalism in the fight against tribalism. Tribalism cannot be eradicated by tribalism. But some politicians are mobilizing their tribe in the fight against tribalism in South Sudan. The use of tribes in the fight against tribalism only creates fertile ground for increasing the spread of tribalism.

We cannot talk of regime change without seriously considering the need for ideological change in our people. Every problem that we encounter in our society is the result of political corruption. Authoritarianism, criminality, impunity, and social injustice are the product of the misguided ideologies of individuals in our society. If there is to be any meaningful political and socio-economic development in our nation, the ideologies of the people of South Sudan must be the principle target of revolution.

Any meaningful new revolution must not ignore the ideologies of the people. It must target the ideologies that pose the greatest threat to our society. The new revolution will be the most challenging revolutionary enterprise that our nation shall experience. This is because it will target the ideologies of individual citizens, where the seeds of tribalism sprout.

The objective of the *New Revolution* is to demolish the system of governance in south Sudan. This current system is associated with ethnocentrism, tension and social injustice. It has failed to deliver services and development to the people. In its place, we must install a functional systems that will address our nation's problems. The objective of the *New*

*Revolution* is to eradicate discrimination of every kind and make South Sudan a socialist republic. In so doing, we shall be able to attain sustainable peace and development.

This requires us to:

**a) Discourage the use of tribalism for political purposes**

Politicians have repeatedly taken advantage of vulnerable tribesmen. They have manipulated politics along tribal lines to achieve their own political goals. They have institutionalized nepotism. They have re-introduced the concept of the domination of government and politics by an ethnic group, as it had been before *Kokora* in 1983.

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*“Political leadership, with a strong tribal orientation having satisfied themselves that the only way to remain in power is to fan tribal loyalties from their tribe, which they believe must dominate because of sheer numbers are now turning around to point a finger at those who want to correct the situation as power hungry politicians; and the basic problem that bedevils any heterogeneous society like ours is how to attain unity. In most cases unity is attained by recognizing and accepting the principle of living in diversity”*

***Pamphlet entitled Decentralization: A Necessity For The Southern Provinces of The Sudan published in 1981***

*Kokora* brings back bad memories in South Sudan’s history. It introduced division amongst us. People were required to uproot and return to their home regions. *Kokora* was a response to the tribalism that had penetrated the government of Southern Sudan<sup>1</sup>. It gained considerable support among tribes, especially the Equatorial tribes, who felt increasingly

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<sup>1</sup> Brought into existence by the 1972 Addis Abba Peace Agreement

marginalized by the domination of the government by a certain ethnic group. This led to accusations that a tribal government had been formed.

When politics is conducted along tribal lines in a multi-ethnic society like South Sudan, every tribe feels compelled to defend their values and their interests. This is in itself a threat to national unity, peaceful coexistence and development. We South Sudanese challenged the domination of Arab-Islamist from the North. We took up arms and fought for our rights. Just as we are now, and as we may well do in future, if we continue to feel marginalized by the domination of another ethnic group. We are loath to lose our dignity and our values. Where there is tribal domination, there is cultural suppression. Where politics is conducted along tribal lines, democracy and nationalism fade away in the face of ethnocentrism.

#### **b) Discourage urban settlements along ethnic lines**

Ethnic enclaves encourage the *Spirit of Tribalism* and hinder integration and coexistence. Locals often feel their land has been grabbed by incoming ethnic groups through such settlements. This is the perception of many South Sudanese, especially Equatorians, as successive waves have settled in Equatoria in recent years. Land is considered to be a central part of a tribe's heritage. It is also the singular source of the tribe's resources. To take away the land from a people is to leave those people without roots or natural possessions.

Systematic land grabbing begins when a large group of settlers occupies and renames the area in which they have settled using their own language. Such as when the Dinka Bor in 1990s settled in *Kotobi* and renamed the area *New Bor*. This raised deep concern among locals and sparked tension between the host community and the settlers. A similar concern of renewed land grabbing is now entrenched among the Bari people. Large, ethnically homogenous settlements have grown all over Bari-land. These, such as *Jebel Dinka*, have already been renamed by the settlers. This can only lead to fresh tension between the hosts and the settlers.

### **c) Encourage Inter-State Civil Servants Transfer Programs**

Civil servants should be incentivised to enrol on fixed term inter-state transfer programs so as to foster a spirit of coexistence and cultural exchange. Civil-servants, through their grassroots engagement with the public, can serve effectively as agents of peace building by providing the opportunity for our, usually insular and secluded, communities to develop an appreciation for the diversity of our society and depth of multi-culturalism amongst South Sudanese.

## PART 2 – THE SPIRIT OF PATRIOTISM

The *Spirit of Patriotism* can be defined as an affection towards national causes. It includes a devotion to the nation at all costs and at all times. A nation is built by patriots. It is made a secure place, for all law-abiding people, by the *Spirit of Patriotism*. However, many South Sudanese today, and not least the intellectuals, have lost the *Spirit of Patriotism*. They no longer treat South Sudan as a home. They are only attracted to South Sudan insofar as it is a place of *employment* and a *financial opportunity* to sustain their residences abroad. Consequently, many have lost interest in the development of the country and the delivery of key services such as health and education.

It has now become an accepted practice for *financially able* South Sudanese to have a home abroad, especially in neighboring countries like Uganda and Kenya. Those that cannot afford a residence in foreign towns, voluntarily send their families to live in Ugandan or Kenyan refugee camps. Meanwhile, they remain in South Sudan to earn the cash needed to support their families abroad.

Some South Sudanese, despite having lived in the country for years and being in long-term employment, prefer to live as visitors in their own country. They stay in hotels and never think to acquire a plot of land or even rent a house. They keep permanent rooms in hotels. They eat their meals in restaurants. When their spouse comes to visit, they too end up in hotels. When they say they are going home, they mean they are travelling abroad to that other country they call home, forgetting they are South Sudanese. They never dream of bringing their families to South Sudan. Rather, they themselves are the ones going for holidays in their countries of dual citizenship to join their families.

Because we no longer treat South Sudan as our home country, we have neglected its development. We pay little attention to the maintenance of existing infrastructure. We under-resource the provision of services, despite the availability of funding and the demand for those services by less materially *fortunate* citizens.

There are four major social indicators that demonstrate how South Sudanese are losing the spirit of patriotism:

### **a) Provision of Health Services**

Since the Khartoum regime handed over control to the SPLM, our health sector has suffered its most extensive decline. There has been no infrastructure development necessary to provide services to South Sudanese. The last batch of hospitals were built by former regimes from the North. Hospitals lack equipment, sufficient staffing, and regular funding. There are no drugs available. Patients are forced to sleep on floors. Medical staff are underpaid and demoralized.

Having lost confidence and interest in their own nation's health provision, our political leaders and senior civil servants prefer to be flown abroad for medical treatment, with their families usually in tow, at the taxpayers' expense. Meanwhile the taxpayers themselves are left to suffer and die from treatable diseases.

### **b) Provision of Education Services**

Schools and educational institutions managed by the government have seen a steady decline in standards. They are starved of educational resources and their buildings and infrastructure have deteriorated substantially. This has discouraged talented individuals from joining the teaching profession. There are no clear policies defining the roles of the public and private institutions. What other policies do exist are never fully implemented. As a result, the standard of education in South Sudan has fallen drastically in recent years and the quality of our graduates, of all levels, is insufficient to effectively serve the country.

Citizens have grown accustomed to seeing SPLM elites and senior civil servants dispatching their children, and extended family members, to study abroad, as a *perk* of the job at the taxpayer's expense. The *financially able* South Sudanese also send their children for schooling abroad. They leave the remaining South Sudanese children to study in poorly provisioned schools, without a proper educational framework in place.

This shows clearly that the SPLM is a visionless organisation that has no interest in the development and prosperity of the citizenry. They have repeatedly failed to treat all citizens equitably in term of service provision. The SPLM prefers to serve the interests of its officials, and wilfully neglects the interests of ordinary citizens.

Consequently, it has become the aspiration of every South Sudanese to send their children abroad for study. Not just for higher education, but starting as early as kindergarten. As a nation, South Sudanese spend millions of US Dollars each year sending their children to study abroad. Imagine the positive impact on our economy if we used that money to provide adequate education facilities in South Sudan. Imagine the opportunities that could be opened for poor South Sudanese families who are unable to send off their children abroad for studies.

### **c) Property and Investment Abroad**

Instead of building and owning property in South Sudan, we are fond of owning properties, such as houses, abroad. We deposit our savings in foreign banks instead of keeping them in South Sudan where they can benefit home grown businesses and sustain the strength of our South Sudan Pound.

### **d) Retention of Dual Citizenship**

Even if the person is a politician or a civil servant, they still maintain dual citizenship. Those that have dual citizenship are often the same ones that are regarded as *intellectuals* and treated as national assets, important to the development of South Sudan.



## PART 3 - THE NEW REVOLUTION

When we talk of the *New Revolution*, we are talking of desired changes that must first target the ideologies of every citizen. Even if there is regime change, or a general change of leadership and political system in the country, and yet the people remain trapped in the same ideologies, then revolution has not truly taken place. There can never be any meaningful change in the nation, capable of fostering a renewed spirit of the national identity, which does not start from the individual ideological realm. It will not be able to sustainably eradicate the scale of the ethnocentrism that South Sudan is facing.

Change that promotes a sustainable model of peaceful coexistence and development must start from a personal change of ideology before we can move towards the collective and national reform. People cannot depend on their government to develop their nation. It is not the sole preserve of government to develop our country. Governments are only facilitators; who set clear regulation, create a positive atmosphere and attract foreign investment. It is up to patriotic citizens to develop the nation. Through hard work, determination and a meaningful commitment to the patriotic ideals to which our nation aspires, the individual must make their own contribution to the betterment of society.

The *New Revolution* can eliminate the tribalism, and in so doing, remove the overriding problem that has crippled South Sudan. It can inspire a *Spirit of Patriotism* among South Sudanese. It can deliver on the long held aspiration of peaceful coexistence and mutually assured development.

Ideological re-orientation at the individual level will be a difficult challenge for all of us. It will affect both our individual and collective rights. However, if it can bring peaceful coexistence and national development, then it must be pursued. No revolution can succeed without a level of intrusion on

people within its society, especially those that are ignorant of the revolutionary agenda and its aspirations.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**John Sunday Martin** is an advocate for national unity, democratic reform and sustainable development, within the context of a multi-cultural South Sudan. He maintains a strong belief in the positive power of patriotism as an antidote to the crippling parochialism that has handicapped the nation since independence.

John Sunday Martin was born in 1981 in the remote township of Amadi in South Sudan. He grew up an orphan and joined the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) at a young age. He rose through the military ranks during the course of the long civil war, which eventually led to the independence of the Republic of South Sudan.

John Sunday Martin went on to serve as spokesman for the Revolutionary Movement of National Salvation (REMNASA), an armed resistance front led by Major General Lasuba Ladoru Wango, prior to its formal amalgamation with the SPLA - In Opposition (SPLA-IO) under the leadership of Dr Riek Machar.

He continues to serve in the military, and currently holds the rank of Brigadier General within SPLA-IO, commanding 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade of Division 9, based in Western Equatoria State.