

An Open Letter to His Excellency President Salva Kiir Mayardit

April 2022

Dear President Kiir,

We come to you once again as representatives of many different organizations, church groups, and denominations of American and British Christians. All of us prayed for South Sudan and cheered when it seceded from the Khartoum regime. All of us rejoiced when South Sudan escaped from forced Arabization and Islamization and became a nation.

Last December we wrote an open letter to you expressing our concerns regarding South Sudan's future. We made specific requests that we hoped you would – at the very least – consider because of our longstanding relationship and our efforts to help South Sudan become a nation. Now, unfortunately, we find it necessary to issue a second open letter in the face of reports of an upsurge in violence in South Sudan and what seems clearly like the collapse of the nation. We are extremely saddened by the horrific attacks reported recently in Jonglei, Eastern and Central Equatoria, Abyei, Unity, Lakes, Upper Nile, and Warrap states.

Mr. President, in our previous [letter](#), published December 4, 2021, we urged you to do the following:

- Fully implement the resolutions and recommendations of the South Sudan National Dialogue that you initiated in December 2016.
- Allow all public rallies to take place with no government, military, or police oppression, intimidation, arrest, or violent crackdown.
- Publicly denounce and revoke arrest warrants on leaders of the People's Coalition for Civil Action (PCCA), for Joseph Akol Makeer, Abraham A. Awolich, Rajab Mohandis, Wani Michael, and Jame David Kolok, and unfreeze their personal bank accounts. Allow these leaders to return to South Sudan and resume their activities without hindrance.
- Unfreeze the bank accounts of the Sudd Institute, Organization for Responsive Government (ORG), Okay Africa Foundation, and the Foundation for Democracy and Accountable Governance.
- Denounce any intentions by any in the South Sudan government to harm or assassinate Joseph Akol Makeer.
- Release Kuel Aguer Kuel, a signatory to the PCCA Declaration who has been under detention for more than 180 days without trial and without formal charges.
- Release also Pastor Abraham Chol Maketh, who was arrested for sharing an opinion considered unfavorable to you, President Kiir.
- Move forward with democratic elections. Allow the people of South Sudan to choose their own future leadership freely and fairly.

It is disappointing that you did not act on these requests, Mr. President. This was a sincere plea from friends who did much to support South Sudan's struggle and help you achieve independence. We *know* that our letter made an impact all over South Sudan. But you did not do us the courtesy of acknowledging the concerns we raised. Instead, government representatives sought to persuade some of us to back off.

Our previous letter said, "failure to take these honorable actions will leave us with the distressing choice to seek to support alternative leadership in the nation." Continued inaction and silence will justify that choice.

We had also implored "1st Vice President Dr. Riek Machar; Vice President Dr. James Wani Igga; General Daniel Awet Akot; General Kuol Manyang Juuk; and other senior SPLM leaders to do the right thing and save your country."

We are encouraged by and gratefully acknowledge recent statements by General Kuol Manyang Juuk and General Daniel Awet Akot asking you to respect the South Sudanese people's call to step down and make room for young leaders¹. Their willingness to step down together with you, President Kiir, is characteristic of their heroic liberation credentials. This is the true spirit of heroic SPLM leaders, many of whom bear the scars and wounds of the liberation struggle. It was the courage and willingness to do the right thing by all of you that won our support during the dark days fighting to deliver South Sudan from Khartoum's genocidal jihad.

It is our hope that Dr. Riek Machar, Dr. James Wani Igga, John Kong Nyuon, Mark Nyipuocho, and other prominent SPLM elders would echo similar perspectives. If these SPLM leaders want to honor – or *restore* – their liberation legacies, they, along with you, must act *now* to enable democratic transition in South Sudan.

As dedicated supporters of the South Sudan people we're concerned that unless the current trajectory is altered, South Sudan's independence may be reversed. The nation is failing, and it's obvious that the leadership is not serving the people well. It is time for leadership turnover, and for SPLM leaders to accept responsibility for leadership and state failure. We are in full agreement with General Kuol Manyang and General Daniel Awet's perspectives. It's no longer possible for you and Dr. Machar to sustain your grip on power.

And we are in full agreement with your recent statement to the press, "We believe that more can be achieved if we can work collectively with our partners to strengthen the capacity of our institutions." We, too, believe it is time to discuss parameters for meaningful peace and reconciliation conversation. Those parameters should include *all* who truly desire democracy, freedom, and the flourishing of South Sudan.

The country is yearning for a fresh start. It is in this regard that we, as western Christians who supported the people of South Sudan and their independence, enthusiastically support:

- U.S. Senate Resolution 380, sponsored by U.S. Senator James Risch, calling on the Secretary of State to identify "a broader range of South Sudanese political and civilian stakeholders, beyond President Kiir and First Vice President Machar, with whom the United States may work for the promotion of peace, democracy, development, accountability, transparency, and anti-corruption efforts."
- U.S. Senator Patrick Leahy's poignant statement about South Sudan and his call for support to the PCCA and pro-democracy civil society in South Sudan.
- The People's Coalition for Civil Action (PCCA), which is the leading pro-democracy effort in South Sudan, along with other non-violent civil organizations calling for change and democracy. We support their call for a new national political dialogue and the recognition of the resolutions of the South Sudan National Dialogue as forming the basis of national consensus. We therefore encourage the SPLM to seek dialogue with these civic organizations like the PCCA to chart a new way forward.

¹ <https://sudantribune.com/article255527/>

You know well, President Kiir, that Christians around the world played a significant role in South Sudan's struggle against genocidal war, starvation, slavery, and racism perpetrated by the Khartoum regime of Sudan.² Christian advocates were instrumental in calling for South Sudan's independence and providing a voice for South Sudan's misery to world leaders such as President George W. Bush, leading to the 2002 Sudan Peace Act and the sponsorship of the 2005 CPA.³ South Sudan's churches were the only civil society institution that stood with the people in the war years, in the face of brutal persecution. And you should know that South Sudan's churches remains the only legitimate institution that people listen to and trust.

In April 2019, three Christian global leaders, His Holiness Pope Francis; Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Reverend Justin Welby; and the Reverend John Chalmers, former Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland; held a retreat at the Vatican to show Christian solidarity with the people and leaders of South Sudan⁴. Pope Francis, in a moving illustration of humility, knelt to kiss your feet during that retreat⁵. Both of you received a Bible signed by the Pope, Archbishop Welby, and Reverend Chalmers with the inscription, "Seek that which unites, overcome that which divides."⁶ The brotherhood of those Christian leaders – Catholic, Anglican, and Presbyterian together – was an eloquent testimony to the power of those words.

These actions were intended to assure you and Dr. Machar that the whole Christian world was behind you, and that the people of South Sudan were not forsaken. Unfortunately, neither you nor Dr. Machar have taken to heart the papal example of humility. You have not shown remorse and repentance in light of the Christ-like witness of these Church leaders. You have not sought that which unites your people. Instead, you have followed advice from evil advisors and pursued that which divides. We are disappointed that you have not responded to the grace and mercy God offers to you even now. Christians that care about South Sudan, and even the secular world, have given you repeatedly the benefit of the doubt. This will change if you do not change, although our commitment to support the people of South Sudan remains unshakable.

We're also deeply concerned about South Sudan's foreign policy and current cohort of friends and "partners." We've been alarmed by South Sudan's significant movement away from traditional friends and allies. Your loss of legitimacy at home and among western allies forced you to desperately seek relationships that are completely contrary to South Sudan's founding principles and liberation ideals. South Sudan's leaders are free to choose with whom they associate, but such choices have consequences. South Sudan will face ever increasing isolation and might witness severing of important historical relationships. You will not find compassion, generosity, and faithfulness amongst "allies" and "partners" like China, Russia, or Arabist/Islamic supremacist nations.

We are deeply distressed that you seem to have forgotten the importance of those with a Judeo-Christian foundation in supporting your long struggle for freedom. Even more distressing, you seem to have forgotten that the very ones from who you are now taking advice and with whom you are now signing agreements are the same ones responsible for the death of over 2.5 million South Sudanese and responsible for, in the words of the Honorable Abel Alier, "too many agreements dishonored."

² [Evangelicals and US policy on Sudan from Foreign Policy in God's Name: Evangelical influence on U.S. policy towards Sudan on JSTOR](#)

³ <https://nationalcouncilofchurches.us/common-witness/2002/sudan.php>

⁴ <https://www.solidarityfriends.org/an-awesome-gesture-a-plea-for-peace/>

⁵ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pope-southsudan/pope-kisses-feet-of-south-sudan-leaders-urging-them-to-keep-the-peace-idUSKCN1RN27G>

⁶ <https://www.solidarityfriends.org/an-awesome-gesture-a-plea-for-peace/>

We urge more South Sudanese church leaders to confront your government in the face of this tremendous suffering, injustice, and misgovernance. The time has come for Christian leaders worldwide, and the church leaders of South Sudan in particular, to stand for justice, democracy, freedom, and for leadership that will not sell out South Sudan and all its resources to those who will destroy the nation. We stand with them.

In conclusion, Mr. President, we want to be clear that we support *nothing less* than the continued full independence of South Sudan and the prospering of the people. Your over-extended stay in power has become a liability. The nation that you have loved and for which you sacrificed so much in the war could very well lose its hard-won independence. While you ignore the advice of church leaders that it is time to step down from power, your government is becoming less and less different from the Sudanese governments from which you liberated your people. At this point it is very difficult to explain to Christians around the world that supported South Sudan's freedom why we should support you and your government. You now seem to have little in common with the valiant struggle against the Khartoum regime, given your actions and your policies.

Having said all that, you still have an opportunity to provide an example to the people of South Sudan of repentance, God's forgiveness, and transformation that the whole nation desperately needs. We thank you for your commitment to have conversation about cooperation. An honest conversation is needed, one that seeks to understand each other and seek true peace and reconciliation. Begin by opening the political space that you know in your heart is right. Allow civil rights activists and political leaders peacefully to exercise their freedom to speak, to assemble, and share their perspectives. An initial gesture of good faith would be to release Kuel Aguer Kuel and Pastor Abraham Chol Maketh unconditionally.

You still have the opportunity to recognize that the resolutions of the South Sudan National Dialogue form the basis of national consensus and use them to lead a new national political dialogue. You can invite the African Union, IGAD and the Troika to help South Sudan create a new national army, not personalized with warlords. You have the opportunity to oversee new democratic transition excluding you and Dr. Riek Machar. And you have an opportunity to reclaim your heroic legacy, the legacy of a warrior that was willing to give his life to defend South Sudan. The time to take these actions is now. We will not sit by and watch South Sudan consumed in endless state-sponsored violence, endless corruption, and endless hunger and poverty.

Henceforth, if you choose to ignore our pleas for the preservation of South Sudan, we will reactivate our advocacy around the world to lobby the United States, United Kingdom, Norway, European Union, and the world, to impose sanctions and possibly war crimes against you and Dr. Machar, key members of your families, and any allies who have had a hand in war crimes and financial crimes in South Sudan. We will also offer support to the PCCA and all the non-violent movements in South Sudan.

If you do not harden your heart any longer, but do what is right for South Sudan, we will be with you in that turn around, to end your presidency with dignity and grace. In 2 Corinthians 6: 2 St. Paul quotes God's words to the Prophet Isaiah, "In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you." Paul goes on to declare that "Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

Now is your time, President Kiir, to finish well and to pass to a new generation of godly South Sudanese leaders the torch of freedom that was passed to you from the hands of the martyrs of South Sudan. You have committed to having conversation about cooperating with those committed to a strong, flourishing democratic South Sudan. If you will reach out to us, we will facilitate such a conversation, and include church leaders from both South Sudan and elsewhere in Africa who care about your nation. We will provide a way for you to reach us privately.

God bless you. We remain your friends, praying for you and for our beloved South Sudan,

Individuals (In alphabetical order. Organizations listed for identification purposes only.)

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Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) Suffering Church Network

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