

*"Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD. LORD hear my voice. Let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication."*

Psalm 130: 1 – 2

February 2014

Sometimes stories have to be told. They are not always happy stories, they are not stories that make us 'feel good' as is the case with most of these, but they still need to be told. The following are a few stories of what has happened to people in South Sudan since fighting began in mid-December. I am leaving out names of tribes and



political persuasions as that doesn't matter. Such atrocities have been committed on both sides.

This is what is left of Bor town, the capital of Jonglei State. During the conflict, the town changed from government to opposition control 4 times. Each time saw more destruction - of homes, businesses, offices and lives. Possessions were looted. If it couldn't be taken, it was destroyed (toilets in IMA staff quarters were smashed) or scattered on the ground.

Remains of Bor town

photo by Dr. Madit

Doctors from Bor State Hospital tell of performing an emergency C-section amidst gunfire. Once successfully completed, doctors and staff fled for their lives. Dr. Thomas Lul, a South Sudanese Canadian was one of the doctors conducting the surgery. On Christmas Day, he was killed in crossfire when he stepped outside the United Nations compound to which he and his bride of a few weeks had fled for safety.

During another take-over of the town, doctors tell of fleeing to the banks of the Nile and hiding in the water amidst tall grasses with women, children and elderly. For over 2 hours they hid in the water, coming up for air and immersing themselves again in the Nile as troops walked along the bank. One elderly man could not stand it any longer, he stood up and started walking towards the bank. He was shot and killed. When the troops finally left, it was discovered that 8 young children had died while hiding in the Nile. One doctor was asked how safe the Nile was, were there not crocodiles and hippos. He laughed and said, "Those were the least of our worries at the time". In Malakal a boat filled mostly with women and children capsized crossing the Nile and many of them died.



People fled to United Nations camp at the edge of town for safety.

Crossing Nile at Bor Photo by Dr. Madit

Others crossed the Nile River in boats to seek refuge in neighboring Lakes State. Others sought sanctuary in churches, but were shot inside the church. One woman, whose husband was killed in the first days of fighting, took her four young children and started walking to Juba. After several days of walking, they arrived safely in Juba and she gave birth to their fifth child the following day.



It is estimated that more than 2,500 people lost their lives in this one town (Bor). Bodies were everywhere – in the streets, in hospitals on beds, in churches, even some in trees. The clean-up still continues as bodies are bagged and brought to mass graves for burial.

As one looks at the pictures, it is hard to imagine the amount of anger and hatred that has brought about such destruction. But not all of the stories have a sad ending. More than 2000 South Sudanese from various tribes – Dinka, Nuer, Shilluk, Anuak and Murle sought refuge in the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan compound in Malakal. Rt. Rev. Peter Gai stood at the gate as people came with guns. He allowed no one to enter with their guns, but insisted they leave them at the gate. If they were wanting to meet someone they were allowed to enter but if they were there for other reasons, they were refused entrance. A very brave position to take and a strong witness.

Hundreds of thousands of South Sudanese have sought refuge in United Nations compounds around the country. There are two large compounds in Juba, each with over 20,000 people cramped into small places. I visited one of those earlier this month to help with a training for traditional birth attendants. After the training I talked with some of the people living there. I asked one of them how long he thought it would be before he could return to his home in Juba. He looked at me with sadness in his eyes and said, “I fear this is my home now. If we try to return to our homes, we will be killed. I must plan on living here.” U.N. standards say there should be 1 latrine for every 50 people. Unfortunately the reality is more like 1 latrine



Juba 3 camp for displaced people



for every 100+ people. I remember sharing one bathroom with my family growing up (16 people), I cannot imagine what it would be like to share with so many!

Cramped conditions, lack of food and water, people hiding in the bush – this is the reality in South Sudan today. Despite a ‘cessation of hostilities’ agreement in January, fighting continues (though on a smaller scale). Parts of the country remain under control of the opposition. Getting basic supplies (food, medicines) to these areas is a challenge. Last week the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator declared South Sudan a level 3 emergency, representing the highest level of humanitarian crisis. That puts them on the same level as Central African Republic, Syria and Philippines.

Please remember the South Sudanese in your prayers. As leaders of the country compete for power, the people struggle to survive. Pray for:

1. An end to hostilities.
2. For justice, forgiveness, reconciliation amongst the different tribes.
3. For unity of spirit.
4. For strong leaders, leaders with integrity and compassion
5. For people to be able to return home and start rebuilding their lives.

If ever there was a time for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on this nation, now is it.

I have watched this young nation grow. I have celebrated with them during their first election, referendum and on their first day of independence. I have been able to do this because of your prayers and support. Now, more than ever, this nation, its people and I myself rely on your continued prayers and support.

Thank you.

In Christ,

*Nanc*