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Press Conference for the Presentation of the Initiative “The Pope for South Sudan”

Intervention of Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson

Timeline

At 11.30 this morning in the Holy See Press Office a Press Conference was held for the presentation of the initiative “The Pope for South Sudan”.

The speakers were:

- **His Eminence Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson**, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development;
- **Sr. Laura Gemignani**, Nzara General Hospital, South Sudan, Comboni Sisters;
- **Dr. Michel Roy**, secretary general of *Caritas Internationalis*;
- **Sr. Yudith Pereira-Rico, R.J.M.**, associate executive director of *Solidarity with South Sudan*.

The following is the intervention by Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, and the timeline of the initiative:

Intervention of Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am happy to address you, to tell you today about the intervention supported by the Holy Father in favour of the population of South Sudan, called “The Pope for South Sudan”. Often out of sight, there is a war that continues to claim victims. Death and desperation afflict the population. The conflict began in 2013 and has caused a very grave humanitarian crisis that sees more than half the population, around 7.3 million people, suffer from hunger on a daily basis. The life of thousands of people has been put at risk by an unprecedented cholera epidemic; a million and a half inhabitants have been forced to flee their villages and cities as a result of the war; in this country massacres and atrocities take place, systematic and generalized, perpetrated against civilians for ethnic reasons; and women and children are victims of violence and abuse every day.

Pope Francis is a universal pastor who overcomes boundaries. He feels the pressing need to raise awareness among the international community of this silent drama, calling for greater and renewed efforts to reach a peaceful solution to the conflict. The Pope repeatedly reaffirmed his desire to travel to South Sudan in spite of this painful scenario, to inspire by his presence a turnaround in the peace process and to give voice to the desperate cry of a Church that wishes to say, “enough weapons, enough rapes, enough death!” The Vatican spokesman, Greg Burke, announced at the end of May 2017 that, since the conditions would not permit the Pope’s visit to South Sudan, this trip – which was scheduled for next October – would be postponed.

Therefore, since the Holy Father is unable to travel to South Sudan personally, he wanted to make tangible the Church’s presence and closeness to the afflicted people through this initiative, “The Pope for South Sudan”. It is an initiative that aims to foster, support and encourage the work of the various religious congregations and international aid organizations that are present in the territory and which work tirelessly to help the population and to promote the process of development and peace.

It is an honour for me to announce that the Pope intends to render active his desire for closeness with the people of South Sudan by promoting – through this Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, of which I am president – some initiatives in favour of the population in various fields. Two projects are in the field of health. These are two hospitals run by the Comboni Missionary Sisters operating in South Sudan: the Wau Hospital, and the Nzara Hospital. One project concerns the field of education: through the association “Solidarity with South Sudan”, it is intended to provide two-year scholarships for students to enable them to obtain a Master’s degree primary school teaching at the Solidarity Teacher Training Centre in Yambio.

In the field of agriculture, a project run by *Caritas Internationalis* that involves around 2,500 families in the dioceses of Yei, Tombura-Yambio and Torit, through tools to encourage farming and livestock breeding, aiming to increase the capacity of local communities to sustain themselves.

The Holy Father does not forget the unheard and silent victims of this bloody and inhuman conflict, and he does not forget all those people who are forced to flee their native country as a result of abuse, injustice and war – he remembers them all in his prayers and in his heart. He firmly hopes to be able to make an official visit to the country as soon as possible: the Church does not give up hope in such a troubled territory; but instead urges bold choices and belief that Divine Providence is capable of achieving what in the eyes of the world seems unreal or impossible.

Timeline

27 OCTOBER 2016: The Holy Father receives in audience the three principal religious leaders of South Sudan, members of the **South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC)**.

15 MARCH 2017: The Holy Father, in a meeting with H.E. Msgr. Gallagher, calls for a significant donation to be sent, and engages Msgr. Dal Toso, delegate secretary DSSUI to prepare a **proposal for the destination of the**

donation. The apostolic nuncio (H.E. Msgr. Charles D. Balvo) will be kept informed.

12 APRIL 2017: The Holy Father approves three projects:

In the field of health, two hospitals are to be run by the Comboni Sisters; support to **medical staff and medicines** for the hospital of Wau (diocese of Wau) [40,000 hospitalizations per year and 6 births per day]; support for medical staff and medicines for the hospital of Nzara (diocese of Tombora-Yambio) [90 patients per day and assistance for children].

In the field of work, *Caritas Internationalis* and *Caritas* South Sudan: **acquisition of seeds and agricultural equipment** in the dioceses of Tombura-Yambio, Yei, Torit, Malakai and Juba, for 2,500 families through the diocesan branches of *Caritas*.

In the field of education, Solidarity with South Sudan (which unites several religious congregations): **teacher training** [and also training for nurses, midwives, agriculturalists and community leaders; 3,482 students received] in the diocese of Yambio.
