



General Secretariat

Geneva, March 30, 2020

To:
South Sudan Council of Churches
World Council of Churches member
churches in South Sudan

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I write to convey the World Council of Churches' great relief and gratitude to God that the long-delayed establishment of the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity in South Sudan was finally achieved on 22 February 2020. We know that the deadline established under successive peace agreements for formation of a Government of National Unity had already been twice postponed, and that in the lead-up to the latest deadline of 22 February fears of renewed conflict mounted, provoking further population movements and instability. I celebrate the spirit of compromise on contentious issues that finally made the formation of this unity government possible, giving renewed hope to the people of South Sudan of the peace and security that they have so long been denied.

Now, however – along with the rest of the world – South Sudan faces a grave new challenge: the COVID-19 pandemic. The destruction of South Sudan's infrastructure through long years of war, instability and corruption has left its people highly vulnerable to this new and unprecedented threat to public health. I pray that the leaders of South Sudan's new government will take the proper measures to protect the people and to support them through this crisis. Borders have been closed and a nationwide curfew declared, but these measures, though necessary in the fight against the virus, will also worsen the existing humanitarian crisis in South Sudan, with so many people displaced, impoverished and dependent upon external aid.

Especially faced with the COVID-19 threat, the government must move swiftly to appoint governors and to establish effective local administrations in the 10 states, so as to fill the existing vacuum of local governance. In that vacuum, inter-communal conflicts, insecurity, lack of access to food, shelter and essential services, and endemic corruption have continued to prevail. And in the absence of effective local governance and coordination of the pandemic response, the virus will proliferate.

The already gargantuan task of reconstruction and securing the future of the people of South Sudan has been made much greater by the pandemic. As during the years of conflict, the churches will be called to provide leadership where it is lacking, to guide and support vulnerable communities through this crisis, and to hold political leaders accountable to their responsibilities to the people. In accordance with the appeal issued by the UN Secretary-General, the leaders of the new government and all other armed actors in the country must put aside their conflicts and antagonisms, and join in facing this common enemy.

The World Council of Churches has long supported the work of the churches and the South Sudan Council of Churches for peace and reconciliation. We will continue to accompany and support you in your efforts to mitigate the humanitarian and social impacts of this pandemic, and for the realization of the aspirations of all South Sudan's people for peace, security and a better future than the past they have known. I pray that God will bless you with courage, wisdom, health and strength for this task, and for your continued ministry and witness to the people of South Sudan.

God, in your grace, lead us all to peace, justice, and to health.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Olav Fykse Tveit". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'O'.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General Secretary

cc. All Africa Conference of Churches