

BUILDING PEACE TOGETHER: ROUND TABLE DIALOGUES FOR SOUTH SUDAN AND DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

By H.E. Cardinal Peter Turkson*

Good afternoon Archbishop Utembi of DR Congo, Ambassadors, Priests, Religious and interested laity. Thank you so much for coming to this important event for South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Your support is very important as we look for ways to continue our efforts to build peace.

The objective of this event is to develop the message of Pope Francis from the prayer service of November 23, by raising awareness about the urgent need for peace in these two countries and, through dialogue, suggest concrete actions.

When you registered for this event you filled out a registration form where many of you indicated your desire to continue your networking with these countries. Many of you have lived in these countries and /or have been involved in peace efforts and would like to focus your energy in bringing about peace.

To counter violence, active nonviolence is an essential transitional process that builds just peace. Your speakers will be here to inspire you to find ways to do this peace building together. Throughout this evening we are seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The people in these countries are becoming more united in their effort to promote the well-being of one another. They have been engaged in nonviolent courageous stands and have become clear about what is important in their countries. These are our friends and community members who have suffered enormously for their convictions but who are standing together to make your voice powerful. We join you in not being silent about the injustices and the need to respect the constitution for your country.

We are here to learn more about your situation and to join in efforts to be united to your hopes and your dreams. The speakers, representatives of your country are here to share their stories. We will walk with you during this time of pain and suffering so we can determine what is ours to do with you.

We know that you are our brothers and sisters and that we are engaged in your destiny. We are all part of one family and work to strengthen our relationships with one another, in a way that we know that we can count on the support of one another to live the values of our Christian life.

This evening “we want to sow seeds of peace” as we visit through photos and personal experiences “sins that spawn and fuel wars: pride, greed, lust for power, lies...” But also know that here are many of our experiences where we realize that our Lord is “at work for us and with us.” We are convinced that Lord, “You are our peace!”

With our Lord, we have had the courage and have nonviolently sought to “break down the walls of hostility that today divide brothers and sisters, especially in South Sudan and Democratic Republic of the Congo.”

Through our efforts to reach out to one another on a daily basis to comfort, to protect and to face the truth of our reality we have been empowered by the Holy Spirit to “believe and trust that the kingdom of God is at hand, in our midst.” The daily media has captured your incredibly courageous actions in which you are instruments of peace and act nonviolently to “combat evil with good, and with deeds of fraternity, respect, encounter and solidarity.” The Bishops, priests, religious, and laity are joined in this effort and today you see the support of your community in Rome.

As a Dicastery that promotes Integral Human Development we know that there is no development without peace. We need to be concerned for the well being of one another and to strive to work for the end of conflicts and promote the respect for human rights. We need to do all in our power locally, nationally, internationally through our areas of contact to be knowledgeable about what is needed and to persist in our advocacy effort to attain this.

Our church has many institutions and through these services are close to the people. This is where we are in touch with the daily needs of our people and strive to minister in the spirit of Jesus. We, in the Vatican want to accompany you through our prayer, through efforts of dialogue, through advocacy for human rights and through accompanying you in your struggles.

The faithful in Rome have gathered here to become more aware of the pain and sorrows of South Sudan and the DR Congo and will to continue find ways to be in solidarity as brothers and sisters of one human family as we engage in “building peace together”.

*Cardinal Peter Turkson is the Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, in light of the Gospel and in the tradition of the Church’s social teaching. The Dicastery is engaged in many concerns for justice and peace.