



STAND/FOR THE VULNERABLE™

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World Relief Statement in Support of Peace in South Sudan December 2014

It has been one full year since the people of South Sudan have been caught in the midst of a conflict that has the country facing severe food insecurity. This, of course, comes three years after the country's independence from Sudan and the north-south wars that led to the referendum for an independent South Sudan in 2011. The crisis has taken unknown thousands of lives, displaced around 2 million people, and left many millions more food insecure. Tragically, it is a crisis that is completely man-made and could be more readily addressed if the parties could reach a political solution to end the conflict. However, it seems evident after multiple rounds of negotiations mediated by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) that the political will to broker a deal on all sides of the conflict is lacking.

As the rainy season draws to a close, many anticipate that there will be an uptick in fighting, and indeed, we are already beginning to see signs of this. In recent months, there have been skirmishes around Bentiu (northern Unity State), Renk (Upper Nile State) and Maban (Upper Nile State) while troops on all sides of the conflict have begun to re-enforce their ranks. This is particularly alarming because while food emergency has been narrowly averted this year, most experts agree that humanitarian resources are stretched too thin to continue to provide aid at the same level as earlier this year. Further, many South Sudanese have watched their reserves, such as crops and livestock, dwindle as the crisis has dragged on. There is a real fear that next year will bring even more food insecurity if the conflict does not come to an end.

World Relief has an established presence in South Sudan and recently began food distributions in Koch County, Unity State to help reach some of the most food insecure parts of the country. In an area that has experienced intense fighting, many humanitarian organizations frequently find themselves caught in the crossfires of the conflict as well as facing many logistical hurdles to reach the most vulnerable.

For our team in Koch County and for those we serve, the conflict has a very real impact on livelihood and the day-to-day struggle for survival. The following is just one story:

Tabitha is a 23-year-old mother whose husband was killed in an attack on Bentiu earlier this year, despite the fact that he was a non-combatant. She fled with her two children, but was cut off from the rest of her family. She slept under a tree by night and foraged for food during the day, but her children quickly began to show signs of malnourishment. Now, she relies on World Relief's food distribution for basic survival, yet even these rations provide only momentary relief. For Tabitha and her two children, she faces a daunting future. However, she still has hope that there will be peace in her country one day.

The United States supported South Sudan long before it gained independence. The U.S. remains the single greatest contributor of humanitarian aid to the crisis and has recently appointed Ambassador Donald Booth to serve as Special Envoy to Sudan and South Sudan, allowing the United States to pursue greater diplomatic options to end the conflict. The U.S. leadership towards South Sudan and Sudan, which has been sustained over many years through various administrations, in addressing both the ongoing conflict and the resulting humanitarian crisis, is commendable. Yet, without further action and resources, there will be increased violence and a deepening humanitarian crisis.

In order to ensure a sustainable and lasting peace in South Sudan, and to meet the increasingly dire humanitarian needs that have resulted from the conflict, World Relief believes that the United States must do the following:

Humanitarian Access and Funding:

Urge full and unhindered humanitarian access to the most vulnerable, including in hard-to-reach areas. Parties to the conflict have inhibited access to humanitarian aid, leaving millions of people food insecure, some on the brink of starvation. In the past, diplomatic efforts have helped open up access in some areas, but as the parties to the conflict grow more and more entrenched, new issues of access have arisen making delivery of aid incredibly difficult. The imposition of bureaucratic impediments, including visa and permit clearances and tax exemptions, make providing quick and timely assistance more difficult.

Uphold humanitarian funding commitments and disburse funding immediately. We have a small window of opportunity to address the acute food insecurity in the country before the crisis impacts more people, yet the United Nation's appeal for \$1.8 billion continues to be underfunded, with a gap of \$535 million and at least 300 thousand people in urgent need of assistance who have not been reached. Timely funding will

ensure that assistance such as water, sanitation, shelter, healthcare, and essential items are delivered to the most vulnerable, including women and children. Responding to other pressing humanitarian crises should not diminish the international community's commitment and response to South Sudan. The United States and other major donors must act now to avert unnecessary loss of life.

Protection:

Support the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) protection of civilians mandate and ensure adequate training for the mandate. The new mandate of UNMISS is an important aspect in protecting those affected by the conflict, however, UNMISS must be given the necessary resources and training to provide protection to those inside and outside of their bases. The United States should work with the UN Security Council, UNMISS, and others to ensure that the mandate to protect civilians is clearly outlined and UNMISS workers receive proper training and resources in order to fulfill the mandate.

Ensure basic protection of civilians, particularly women and girls. The majority of those who are displaced are women and children, and recent reports indicate that sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) has become commonplace in camps and on UNMISS bases where many have fled for safety. Due to the shortage of food and resources, many are forced to leave the camps to find sustenance. However, this leaves them at a greater risk of rape and other forms of SGBV. One way to help protect women and girls and ensure that victims receive proper treatment is to ensure there are adequate women peacekeepers and police within the camps and on UNMISS bases, as it increases UNMISS's ability to establish trust, particularly with women who are victims of SGBV. The United States should work with UNMISS and donors to provide training and protection of women and girls and other vulnerable groups within the camps and on UNMISS bases.

Stability and Security:

Support an arms embargo on South Sudan to help ensure small arms are not readily available for those who seek power through violence. While it is critical to seek a political—rather than military—solution to the conflict, neither side seems to be prepared to do so. In the meantime, curbing access to arms will help stabilize the crisis until the parties to the conflict finally act on their commitments to establish a transitional government and work toward a sustainable peace. The United States and international community must explore tougher measures to curb the flow of arms to South Sudan.

Peace:

Urge IGAD to include civil society voices in the ongoing peace processes. While the ongoing conflict is often viewed as the result of elite warring parties, real sustainable peace requires participation from all of society. The cessation of violence must start with understanding and engaging with the clear and direct drivers of the conflict. Any political process that is agreed to in Addis Ababa will only be recognized and owned by the people of South Sudan if they feel included in the process. Thus, any political peace process must represent the needs of people from across the spectrum, including religious groups, women and youth.

Prioritize reconciliation and healing as a part of the peace process. In [remarks](#) at the Atlantic Council in October 2014, Ambassador Booth recognized the importance of reconciliation and healing as a meaningful component of sustainable peace in South Sudan. While the United States continues to support the African Union Commission of Inquiry, there is also a need for efforts at the grassroots level. As communities work through the impact of the conflict, there need to be opportunities for groups to reconcile and for individuals to begin to work through their own trauma in order for communities to rebuild trust and for sustainable peace to follow. To that end, the church in South Sudan has made great inroads through the [Reconciliation Church Council](#), [South Sudan Peace and Reconciliation Commission](#), and other efforts. The United States should lift up these voices as contributors to both the political negotiations in Addis Ababa, as well as the efforts on the ground to bring about peace at the local level. The role of religious leaders in bringing communities together and training individuals in how to respond to trauma and conflict should be supported by the United States and international community.

While there are many challenges in South Sudan, there are specific steps the United States and international community can take to ensure that the situation does not deteriorate any further. The South Sudanese people are resilient and strong, and have a will and determination to live in peace. The United States and international community have rightly been engaged in diplomacy with the leaders of South Sudan and IGAD members to ensure the peace process is viable and inclusive. The United States should continue to pursue such actions while also seeking to secure unhindered and robust humanitarian assistance for the South Sudanese. As the newest country in the world, peace is indeed possible in South Sudan with the support of the United States and international community.