

On behalf of the Episcopal Church of the Sudan specifically Yambio Diocese, I would like to take this opportunity to thank:-

- a) God for He knew this day will come, for His endless love, undying mercies and peace above everything and for making this dream a reality.
- b) I would like to sincerely register our thanks to our hero the late Dr. John Garang De Mabior and all the fallen freedom fighters – your struggle wasn't in vain.
- c) His Excellency Salva Kiir Mayardit, the president of the Republic of South Sudan the successor to the late Dr. John Garang De Mabior, who continues to fight and strives for the rights and the identity of the South Sudanese.
- d) I thank Omar al Bashir for being our President and through his ruling though, we the South Sudanese were hard pressed we were not crushed, we were struck down, but we were not destroyed, though we were persecuted we did not despair. Through his leadership and as the result of our struggle we know what peace is, joy, self control, patience, faith and above all we have increased in love for ourselves and our nation.
- e) More specifically to our Governor of Western Equatoria State His Excellency Joseph Bangasi Bakosoro and the entire cabinet for their strong leadership here in WES.
- f) The International Community and friends of South Sudan for your continuous support and struggle that have made it possible for us to witness this day.
- g) Our chiefs and the local community for their great contribution in supporting SPLM/A activities.
- h) I acknowledge the endeavors and support by the churches in collaboration with Sudan Council of Churches for praying and advocating for peace worldwide.
- i) I thank all the organized forces for standing firm to fight for the rights of their people and maintain security nationwide.
- j) I will not fail to recognize the support by our mothers – the special and extraordinary women of Sudan and specifically those in South Sudan for sacrificing their children to participate in the tough job of fighting for their country.
- k) I thank all the South Sudanese worldwide for their roles and contribution in seeing that this auspicious day is witnessed and today, we all stand as victors.

We want to thank the Lord for this day, which is marking a great history in the life of South Sudan and South Sudanese worldwide and making our dream a reality.

It is not something new for the South Sudanese to have independence; first we had independence from the British witnessed by our fore fathers but today we are celebrating South Sudan Independence from our brothers in the North. This day is a great joy for all the southerners and even friends who stood by us and those are witnessing with us this occasion today.

The struggle for this Independence Day came about because Southern Sudanese were not recognized by northerners and were marginalized. Their rights were denied. Southerners live in their own country like slaves, IDPs or even refugees, there was no way we would have this freedom and people had to fight for their rights. There was nowhere a South Sudanese would become a president but today we have H.E Salva Kiir Mayardit.

When the war begun, most of us were displaced and sought refuge in neighboring countries and abroad. We lost our identity, our culture and tradition and some have lost their lives during and after war. Some have gone to countries and may never return home.

During this war, the positions of the church and Sudan Council of Churches have been very vital to help in looking for food support and medical supplies for the IDPs and the refugees. Schools were built during this time and most of our children went to church schools. The SPLA/M was fighting in order to get our freedom while the church was struggling to render services to the community. The church has participated fully in praying and fasting for the war to end.

After the war, though the church established a strong relationship with the government, they rarely seek for our opinion and only ask us to open and close prayers during functions and ceremonies. Let me make it clear, the church is the voice of the voiceless for instance: - **“why is the church not participating when things like constitution of the country is being written or amended?” “Is the church not part of the country or the community?”** We the churches do see that we have collective roles to play. The church has been praying for the safety of the South Sudanese and that after the war people may live peacefully with each other despite the challenges we have from the LRA, Ambororo, the WES – Lakes State border conflict which also leads to loss of lives of the same citizens of South Sudan. The church have involved in creating peace between cattle owners and the farmers twice in WES and thirdly by the government of WES.

The church stands to see to it that peace is prevailing among the communities.

"There is no easy walk to freedom anywhere, and many of us will have to pass through the valley of the shadow of death again and again before we reach the mountaintop of our desires" NELSON MANDELA

We have come a long way but we have a longer journey ahead of us. Today our new baby has been born and it's our duty and responsibility to nurture and care for this baby. Teething problems are inevitable but let take them as a strength and not weakness.

This is the beginning of our freedom, self dependence, free to work, free to walk, free to live and to express our own views and feelings.

As we march into a new country let us tag along:-

1. The spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation not only amongst ourselves but with our brothers in the North.
2. The art of loving one another as sisters and brothers. Let us shun tribalism and hatred towards one another. Let us respect each other's culture and learn to coexist happily. We the church and the government need to fight tribalism by building strong unity among the citizens or else we will create a new war which may have no end. In addition let us make room for our brothers and sisters who have returned back home and those who wish to return. This is our home and your home. East or West home is best. You are all welcome!
3. Respect human life - God is the Author of Life therefore it is sacred. We have lost one too many lives in the war- let us eradicate tribal wars and all types of atrocities such as, social violence, gender inequality and any other activity that degrades and undermines human dignity.
4. Let us embrace agriculture and our vast resources. Agriculture is the back bone of any wealthy nation and we the Western Equatorians are privileged to have vast, green, beautiful and fertile land. The governor has been campaigning for WES to engage in agricultural activities but we need the technical knowhow in modern agricultural system. The chiefs should distribute land to the indigenous and ensure everybody cultivates.
5. Education must be a priority in this country. No nation can be developed without education. The government should close down all halls that engage in ludo, dominoes, cards, pool and "abanga" at least during working hours! It must make sure that either children are in school or adults are working. Girl child education must be advocated for and a stringent law that favour and protects our girls.
6. A healthy nation is a wealthy nation- Let us take care of our bodies and ourselves, eat healthy nutritious foods and drinks, take time to exercise, take time to read the Bible and pray for it is food for the soul.

May God bless our President Salva Kiir Mayadit, all our leaders countrywide, our Governor H.E Joseph Bangasi Bakosoro and all the South Sudanese worldwide.

LONG LIVE SOUTH SUDAN!! HAPPY INDEPENDENCE DAY!!

The Rt. Rev. Peter Munde Yacoub

Diocese of ECS Yambio

