

South Sudan from Dec 15-2013 to January 21, 2014, SSpS Community Yei

The time before Christmas is a beautiful time of Advent which I like very much: joy, expectation, silence...The community of the Missionary Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit/ SSpS Sisters /in Yei was preparing to start to pray the beautiful prayers of novena for Christmas. They were in Yei four Srs. Mercy Benson, Isabela Sabu, Veronika Theresia Rackova and Carmen Silvero. They said Good bye to Sr. Stella Arul SSpS who went after 6 years serving at Catholic Health Teaching Institute in Wau with community of Solidarity with South Sudan/SSS/and was going back soon to her home country India. On December. 5 came also Fr. Joseph Callistus cmf, director of SSS to say Good bye before going to Germany for his new mission .After leaving Yei the SSS members stopped in Lainya to greet the community of the SVD Fathers and the following day wanted to proceed to Juba. Unfortunately in the morning on Dec.16, the Yei -Juba road was blocked and they had to stay in Lainya for two more days. We got to know that there was an attempted coup in Juba and many people lost life. The former Vice President Riek Machar started a rebel movement in Jongley state, Unity state and Upper Nile State. The rebels captured Bor, Malakal and Bentiu. The political problem turned into ethnic clashes between the tribe of Riek Machar/Nuer/ and President Salva Kiir's tribe /Dinka/.

The SSpS community in Yei could celebrate Christmas peacefully, but everybody was affected with the sad news from other parts of the country about fighting between Nuer and Dinka tribes. The women and children who were in danger tried to save their life in UN camps in the country or run abroad to Refugee camps in Uganda, Kenya and Ethiopia.

The NGOs members from abroad were leaving the country. The Juba airport was congested and people were struggling to get flights to leave S. Sudan.

Our community decided to stay with the people. Each of us made her own discernment and we felt we cannot leave the people in such situation of distress and insecurity. They needed our support psychologically, spiritually and physically. On January 4, 2014 Saturday evening at 10 .30 p. m. before going to bed we heard suddenly heavy shooting starting close to our house and saw flying bullets like a fire behind the river Yei which is about 500 meters far from our house. We did not know what was happening. We knew

only that almost all Nuer families esp. mothers with children left our neighborhood on the other side of the river.

Immediately after hearing heavy shooting we switched off the lights and run into one room and lied together on the floor. Our Parish Priest gave us a short phone call telling us: "Courage, sisters, lie down on the floor, do not move and pray." This was what we did. The shooting continued in intervals till 3 am. In the morning we heard the church bell ringing for the 8.00 am mass. The people who came for the service were few because they were afraid to lose their life.

The shooting on the Feast day of Epiphany was for us like a night mare. The commissioner encouraged the people not to be afraid and told us that the SPLA chaste the rebels into the bush. Four of us experienced shooting for the first time in our life.

The people were warned to take care of the children and not to go out at night. After the mass one Nuer women went to Bishop Erkolano Lodu Tombe to thank him for his encouraging words about being one family of different tribes in S. Sudan ,living in peace and stopping fighting. She was wounded because she run early in the morning to protect her children who hearing shooting left house. But the children were faster than her so she did not reach them. She was asking for help to make announcement and to find them. Among those children was just two months old child which her 6 years old sister took in her arms and run away to save its life.

I was called by Fr. Emmanuel Sebit, the Director of Catholic Radio to come and help the mother who lost the children because while running to find her children she got attacked at the bridge and became wounded. Radio Easter made announcement about the lost 6 children. We took the mother to the Diocesan St. Bakhita Health Centre where she got the necessary treatment and food. Her hands were completely empty. She had only faith that her children will be found. God heard our prayer and the following day 4 children were brought to the Health Centre. They were very happy to see their mum and the mum them. They were hungry, thirsty and exhausted. One of the little one became sick but started to recover very soon.

The situation in the town similar like in the whole country became tense because of rebel movement and killing people. The government had to protect the IDP/Internally Displaced People/ .They decided to take the Nuer people to UN compound in Yei. Before leaving our health facility the mother was still missing 2 children and asked for prayer. The following day we got

the good news that two women brought one boy from that family to Radio Easter. Our joy was great because the lost son was found!

In the meantime the UN compound is filled with almost 600 people living under tents under critical conditions depending on the help of others. They are receiving food, shelter, water, medicine...from our people and some organizations.

Our SSpS Community is trying to help the needy with food, water and medical care under the Umbrella of Caritas and in collaboration with others.

Recently somebody asked me why I am staying here under such circumstances.

Why- Because Jesus continued his way and did not give up when it became difficult. He accepted suffering, hardships and carried the cross till the end. He remained obedient to the will of the Father.

He was always with the people. He did not abandon them. He was even ready to accept the death, because he loved them.

Being a woman disciple of Jesus I am following the footsteps of Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. I cannot leave the people of South Sudan because I love them. They are happy that we stay with them, pray with them and work together building this young and fragile country. The people need our support, prayer and help. At this junction I would like to thank to all who supported us with their prayers, sacrifices and finances. We are called to be sign of hope esp. in the time of darkness. God will never abandon us, because he is he is our Emmanuel=God with us.

Sr. Veronika Theresia Rackova, SSpS

January 21, 2014



Mother with children before leaving St. Bakhita Health Centre for the UN camp



Srs. Isabela and Carmen greeting people at UN camp in Yei



The youngest member of the family rescued by her little sister



UN IDP Camp, Yei with about 536 people



Sr. Veronika Theresia with the Nuer family before the leaving St. Bakhita Health Centre



Two water tanks donated by SSpS Sisters to the IDP at UN camp Yei, Central Equatoria State