



# THE SUDD INSTITUTE

RESEARCH FOR A PEACEFUL, JUST AND PROSPEROUS SOUTH SUDAN

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## Weekly Review

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### **South Sudanese in Utah are a Sign of Hope and Peace in South Sudan**

*Augustino Ting Mayai*

Since the recent war struck in South Sudan, there has been an increasing tendency by the South Sudanese ethnic communities to sever relations among themselves. In particular, members of the Dinka and Nuer ethnicities in the Diaspora quickly retreated back to their localities and started to avoid interacting with each other in public. For instance, a community center in Des Moines, Iowa, which once hosted South Sudanese of all walks of life (but dominated by Dinka and Nuer), closed soon after the 2013 violence. Parallel centers ensued, creating pieces of homogenous settings within the larger context, i.e., separate community centers for the Nuer and Dinka. Thus, the political violence that has now taken ethnic overtones back home has also caused or deepened rifts between the two largest South Sudanese ethnic communities in the Diaspora. There was even death associated with these Dinka-Nuer ethnic rifts in the state of Minnesota in 2014. Alternatively put, the war has greatly undermined the South Sudanese social fabric, which will demand significant investments in order to rebuild when stability returns.

But hopes in the South Sudanese successfully overcoming their present difficulties could be revived, as we observed this past week in the state of Utah where a sizable number of South Sudanese resettled as refugees over a decade ago. This week's review discusses what this signifies for restoring peace in South Sudan.

While the Dinka and Nuer residing in Utah continue to have political differences and clearly, the two communities seem divided between Dr. Riek and President Kiir, the war principals, they seem to have objected to South Sudan's deadly politics that would weaken their social relations. In the pursuance of this cordial relation, a market popularly known as K & K in the Greater Salt Lake City Area, and which happens to be owned by two Nuer brothers in Salt Lake City, remains a vibrant social hub for all South Sudanese. The Nuer and Dinka are socially bonding as usual, playing games, joking, sharing meals, and openly and objectively conversing about their home affairs with limited emotions. K & K, so to speak, is an embodiment of what is best for the South Sudanese and what they should collectively aspire to: establishing an environment that transcends politics and binds them all.

The South Sudanese communities in Utah should be applauded for keeping the unity alive during these difficult times. Their approach towards the current fragility back home is what the country needs to exploit so as to reconstitute its shattered social fabric. These communities understand that there is a separation between politics and social relations or endowments. After all, this is not the first time grassroots peace initiatives have engendered an encompassing unity in South Sudan. In 1999, more specifically, a faith-based grassroots targeted peace and reconciliation dialogue, popularly known as the Wunlit Accord, culminated in a relatively long lasting and effective cohesion between the Nuer and Dinka. The Accord equally consolidated the southern voice against the north by reuniting the key SPLA factions formed following the 1991 split, eventually feeding into a fruitful conclusion of the comprehensive peace agreement (CPA) in 2005.

Just like the communities in Utah have shown, South Sudan does not run short of stories about people-centered peace initiatives. Other grassroots-based, more recent, peace dialogues that are worthy of note here include the Jonglei peace consultations<sup>1</sup>. These consultations gathered the Lou Nuer, and Duk and Twic East of Bor Dinka to deliberate upon their future as peaceful neighbors. In Warrap State, similar initiatives between the Dinka and Nuer are being undertaken<sup>2</sup>. In support of peace, Warrap currently hosts nearly ten thousand of internally displaced residents from Unity State. Here, the results are promising, as the South Sudan's ordinary population seemingly advocates for peaceful coexistence within and across their borders.

To live in unity with others and attain peace and prosperity are not necessarily the choices one willingly makes. These are basic requirements of a successful society. Notwithstanding egos inherent in humanity, these attributes of a stable community that justly and adequately caters to its members are certainly incompatible with hate and insidious aspirations. This fine line between abhorrence and tolerance, the South Sudanese community in Utah, well comprehends. All of this affirms the significance of the grassroots in building and sustaining peace. Grassroots' demand for peace increases social bonds by curtailing both intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic tensions, and nudges the warring politicians towards a viable settlement of their differences. Present and future peace-related endowments in South Sudan, even those concerned with bridging differences between politicians, need to reflect some aspects of demands from the grassroots. Most important, inter-community conversations on peace ought to be undertaken along side political arrangements to permit attaining a comprehensive, coherent, and long lasting package of tranquility.

Summarily, South Sudanese in Utah have demonstrably shown that political differences can be overcome as long as unity trumps all else.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article54285>

<sup>2</sup> <http://blogs.prio.org/MonitoringSouthSudan/2014/08/state-briefing-warrap-state/>

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### **About Sudd Institute**

The Sudd Institute is an independent research organization that conducts and facilitates policy relevant research and training to inform public policy and practice, to create opportunities for discussion and debate, and to improve analytical capacity in South Sudan. The Sudd Institute's intention is to significantly improve the quality, impact, and accountability of local, national, and international policy- and decision-making in South Sudan in order to promote a more peaceful, just and prosperous society.

### **Author's Biography**

*Augustino Ting Mayai* is the Director of Research at the Sudd Institute. He holds a PhD in Sociology, with concentrations in demography and development studies from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He currently studies how state effectiveness affects child health outcomes in South Sudan and Ethiopia. Augustino has written extensively on South Sudan's current affairs.