

# Churches call for peaceful vote in Sudan

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Canterbury, England 7 January (ENInews)--The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, has urged all Anglicans and Christians from other denominations to stand with the Sudanese people as that country prepares for its historic referendum that starts on Sunday (9 January) and ends the following Saturday (15 January).

In a statement issued (7 January) from Lambeth Palace in London, Dr Williams, who is the spiritual head of the 87 million-member worldwide Anglican Communion, described the referendum that will determine the fate of mainly Christian and oil-rich Southern Sudan as "an immensely important day." He urged Christians to stand with the Sudanese people "to ensure that the referendum takes place peacefully and that the process and the results are fully respected."

Sunday's referendum is the final provision in Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which was brokered by Britain, the US and Norway in 2005 and which brought to an end the decades-long civil conflict that has claimed more than two million lives.

Voting will decide whether South Sudan and North Sudan remain as one or separate with Southern Sudan becoming a new African state.

The Northern regime of President Omar al-Bashir wants to hold on to the south and the 480,000 barrels of oil a day that are pumped from its fields. African and Western politicians fear that if Southerners vote for a separate state, it would trigger the renewal of war between the mainly Muslim North and predominately Christian South.

In an interview on 6 January with Episcopal News Service's Matthew Davies, the Sudanese Bishop (Anglican) Joseph Garang of the Diocese of Renk said that everyone in Sudan is praying for peace.

He told ENS: "All the troops from the North and South are on the border and facing one another. Too many people have died during the civil war and we don't want that to happen anymore."

He praised Christians for supporting Sudan and praying for peace saying, "If we did not have our brothers and sisters in the UK, America, Canada, Australia, we don't think that the Comprehensive Peace Agreement would have happened. The church played a big role and talked with their governments, and their governments took action. The partnerships are very important to ensure that peace happens." Staff at the Episcopal church of Trinity Wall Street in New York have set up a section on their website called Praying for Peace that features links to a range of resources and actions including a Facebook group and an open letter to the United Nations Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon, asking for a greater UN commitment to Sudan.

Capturing the spirit of Sudanese Christians, and helping to tell their stories of living in and around the country's North-South border region, has been a year long passion and media project for a team of Episcopalians from the Diocese of Chicago. The Renk Media Team has launched an educational video for those considering forming partnerships with the Episcopal Church of Sudan. The media team is named after the Diocese of Renk which is on the border between North and South Sudan.

A report issued (9 January) by the Anglican Communion News Service in London said that Anglican leaders from Sudan continue to call for support from brothers and sisters across its worldwide network.

ACNS said the Rt Rev Anthony Poggo, Bishop of the Diocese of Kajo-Keji, has asked for prayers for his country. He said the choice this Sunday was between unity and separation: "It is very likely that the people of Southern Sudan will vote for secession."

Reid Trulson, executive director of American Baptist International Ministries, called for a peaceful outcome to the referendum. "In the historic referendum, the people of Southern Sudan will decide whether to change Sudan's present borders that were put in place by colonial powers, in order to form a country in the South that is separate from the North. We urge prayer that this process will be conducted in a manner that respects the dignity and well-being of all."

Sudanese people who live in Europe will be allowed to vote at booths set up at the Methodist Hall close to the British Parliament in London. Registration centres have

also been set up in Australia, Canada, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenyan and Uganda. Nearly 10,000 South Sudanese live in Britain.

Gabriel Dharmi, 45, told ENInews: "I was born in war and I grew up in war. My children have the same problem. This Sunday we are going to end the miserable life of our people."