

83. Worrying Times

South Sudan has negotiated elections and the referendum, and achieved independence, with remarkable clam and stability. The fears of outbreaks of violence and lawlessness have been largely unfounded and the country has moved smoothly to becoming the world's newest nation. There has been some inflation in prices and some shortages, especially in northern regions, but one can only say we have been well led to this point. Peace and stability have been preserved.

One cannot fail to notice there is a 'liberation' among the women in the style of western clothing they are now choosing to wear. People seem to be more relaxed and confident that they are indeed able to choose their own destiny rather than suffer the imposition from others; but there are some emerging concerns. The mood of optimism and confidence continues but slowly the awareness is dawning that independence does not bring instant rewards for the general population.

There has been no town power in Malakal since August 25th. The people of that city formerly received the benefits of a power supply every night. I was there for the independence celebrations on July 9th and we enjoyed power all that day. Before independence, a power grid operating during daylight hours in Wau. That has now ceased. Wau and Malakal, after Juba, are the two largest towns in South Sudan.

In Juba, however, twenty-four hours of power had continued. After all, it is the capital of the new country. But the last 'town power' in Juba was supplied on October 5th and it has now been almost two weeks with no sign of town electricity. *'We have no fuel'* for the generators, we have been told. Fuel has been in short supply in Juba but new supplies became available a few days ago – but still no town power. Maybe it is a case of not having the money to buy the fuel.

Leading up to independence a huge amount of hurried work took place upgrading Malakal airport. Construction of a new international terminal was moving quickly. One could not help but be impressed that the modern new terminal was taking shape – especially since it had been partly constructed for several years - after two previous construction firms, at considerable intervals apart, walked off the job when they were not paid. This time it will be finished, we thought. Two weeks ago, the pace of construction had noticeably slowed but there was still a little work going on. Yesterday, although it was a normal working day, I noted the site gates were locked and there was no construction activity.

No doubt there is money flowing into Juba. Large, new, premium model, four-wheel drives are proliferating on the roads. Congested traffic is rapidly becoming the norm even with the improvement made to the roads since the war ended. Obviously, some people are prospering. I find myself surmising that money is reaching the pockets of the leaders but not much is getting through to support basic infrastructure. That is not good for the normal people of South Sudan.

Sudan, in the north, has made it more difficult by not allowing goods to flow over the border. There are rumours that the President, Al Bashir, is no longer in effective control. There are still agreements to be negotiated over revenue-sharing from oil – and debt sharing. How much of the present difficulties will turn out to be only the consequence of short term posturing is simply not known. I think general optimism still prevails; but it is clear that even in a climate of good will, it will take time – and integrity – for a sound new infrastructure to be developed in South Sudan.

- Br Bill

Footnote:

In the interim between my writing the above and having access to the Internet to send it out, Juba town power returned. Al hamdu lilah! But it only lasted three hours!



Br. Denis & friends



Brothers Amilcare & Craig visiting



Brothers Jorge, Alvaro, & Joseph
visiting in Juba Cathedral



De La Salle Brothers in South Sudan



Eyes of hope



Field of beans



John carrying beans



Mixing concrete by hand



South Sudanese children with Br. Alvaro



Volunteer Julie & Fr. Manny, CM