Solidarity with South Sudan

A miracle in progress

On 12 June the Australian Embassy to the Holy See hosted a briefing on a miracle being made in South Sudan by the Catholic inter-congregational aid programme Solidarity with South Sudan. Presentations were given by Executive Director Sr Patricia Murray, IBVM, and by Sr Roxanne Schares, SND, a member of the Personnel Committee and Governing Board of Solidarity. Sr Patricia, who was instrumental in the founding of the programme, was recently named one of Inside the Vatican’s “Ten Top People 2011” in recognition of the work of the organisation. Sr Roxanne, who is also the coordinator of the international network for justice, peace and the integrity of creation for her Congregation, the School Sisters of Notre Dame, has visited all Solidarity communities and met with a number of the Sudanese officials involved.

The event, which was attended by Vatican officials, NGO representatives, members of the diplomatic community and local media, was well timed, as it coincided with the visit to South Sudan by former Australian Ambassador to the Holy See, the Hon. Tim Fischer, AC, on 15-17 June. Mr Fischer visited the Solidarity community in Juba during his visit and also discussed the work of Solidarity during his meeting with President Salva Kiir (see photo above).

A collaboration of over 200 religious orders worldwide, Solidarity is still one of the most effective and active NGOs in South Sudan, providing the largest private teacher training facility, as well as training programmes in health and agriculture. It is led by a small team of five, including one Australian, at its Rome directorate. On the ground in South Sudan are 31 religious and lay people (both male and female, a unique aspect of the programme), drawn from 20 different orders and 14 nationalities based on their fields of expertise. They run five communities in Malakal, Rumbek, Wau, Yambio and Juba, at which education and health care programmes are being developed in coordination with the Government of the Republic of South Sudan (ROSS). The sustainable agriculture project in Rumbek is working closely with various ministries in Western Equatoria and another agricultural project is planned for Yambio.

Prayer brings into being men and women who can love

lives. “If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” (Jn 14:23). Jesus said, promising the disciples the gift of the Holy Spirit, “And when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth” (Jn 16:25-27).

TO SPECIAL GROUPS

I offer a warm welcome to the Forum of Interreligious Harmony from Indonesia. My greeting also goes to the participants in the Vatican Observatory Summer School. I likewise greet the “Wounded Warriors” group from the United States. Upon all the English-speaking visitors present at today’s Audience, including those from Scotland, Australia, Indonesia, Japan, Pakistan, the Philippines and the United States, I invoke God’s blessings of joy and peace!

I am following with deep concern the news from Nigeria, where the terrorist attacks specifically directed at the Christian faithful are continuing. While I raise prayers for the victims and for all who are suffering, I appeal to those responsible for the violence to put an immediate end to the bloodshed of so many innocent people. In addition, I hope for the full collaboration of all the members of Nigerian society so that they do not pursue the path of revenge but rather begin to build your life in common.

Lastly, I extend a thought to the young people, the sick and the newlyweds. The month of June recalls our devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus: dear young people, learn to love at the school of that Divine Heart; dear sick people, join your hearts in suffering to that of the Son of God; and you, dear newlyweds, draw from the sources of love while you are beginning to build your life in common. Many thanks.