The Sudan Tribune on April 9th reported as follows:

'The Sudanese authorities at Khartoum airport on Monday prevented around 200 southern Sudanese from boarding their planes saying they can only do so now using travel documents issued by Juba. Paul Madut, a southerner at the airport, said he was surprised to find out in the early morning hours that the flight to Juba was moved to the international terminal. Upon inquiring, he was told that his booking is cancelled and that he cannot leave using a Sudanese passport.....

South Sudan became an independent state last July and this week Khartoum declared that they are now officially considered foreign nationals and will be treated as such. They were given 30 days to register with Sudanese authorities.

The issue of citizenship has been a contentious item in the post-independence negotiations between north and south Sudan. Khartoum rejected any talk of dual citizenship and insisted that all 500,000 southerners in the north should make arrangements to adjust their status or depart to new state. "They need passports to board flights," a Sudanese police officer told Reuters from inside the terminal..... Until Sunday flights to the southern capital Juba had been conducted at the domestic terminal without passport controls.'

Recently, just before Easter, one of our De La Salle Christian Brothers from France who lives and works in Khartoum, Brother Yves Lecocq, who has been a great help to Solidarity with South Sudan, wrote to me giving the description below. He readily agreed to my request to mail his words out more widely. This is what he wrote:

*I shared Holy Thursday liturgy in one of the last and poorest chapel of the shanty areas, where there are still remaining Christian Southerners. In this place (Mayo-Mendela), there are a lot of ruins, but also new buildings, and huge stocks of luggage waiting for trucks, train or barge on the Nile .  I went there with a Jesuit, friend of mine, Hans Putman, who left Sudan last year, for Syria ...He was celebrating mass very often in this center named Kizito, where I used to accompany him frequently. I was with Angelo, an old Dinka friend, who is a catechist. He has worked with the United Nations for years and he was very happy to be there. He proposed to accompany me for a forthcoming visit to another center.

Most of the congregation, that reached over 100 by the end of the celebration, were youth and children with some elders. It was a very simple, pious, beautiful celebration, that could finish before the night (no electricity) The last five minutes were a silent 5 minute*
adoration (The priest had to remove the holy sacrament.) Very impressive the faith of these people which is their first wealth, and probably the only one. It was for me the nicest "Salut du Saint Sacrement “Blessed Sacrament adoration” – "salat el sougoud" – as they say and propose often here. This time I felt it joined the life of people, who, as poor and simple as they are, receive the light of what is really everything for them.

Here in Khartoum, thousands of Southerners are waiting for the 9th of April, with very mixed feelings, but most of them are afraid facing the unknown situation where they have been fully forgotten by big politicians. They became "foreigners in their country", and now foreigners without any papers... Our young guard, Santino, who is from Abyei told me today "we are hostage", to be used in political agreements. But he keeps a very positive attitude and is a very fine young Southerner Christian.'

Now there are reports of troop confrontations in the oil-rich area of Heglig. The language in use by both sides is becoming more bellicose. Yet I firmly believe there is a continuing will for peace. How much there is posturing and political positioning, and how much it is genuinely escalating confrontation, it is hard to say. Outside pressure from other nations is being applied to keep the peace but there is no doubt that the people in these disputed areas are suffering. Let them not be ‘fully forgotten’. For those of us in the south there is a general sense of well-being and security – certainly no alarm or fear. By the way, our Superior General, Brother Alvaro, is visiting our Brothers in Khartoum during these next few days. So reading reports from afar please do not form an impression of two countries in a highly volatile situation. Yes, there are certainly issues to resolve and suffering people who find themselves the unfortunate ‘hostages’ of political agreements. But most in north and south are leading normal lives.

One of my joys was to teach a Science class of trainee teachers in Yambio and to have three women from Nuba Mountains happily seated and attentive in the front row. There are two more women and a man from Nuba Mountains in that class and also two women from Abyei, another disputed area. The photo I am including with this report shows Sr Sandra with the Abyei women in Yambio. Next week three of our members, including Sr Sandra, head to the Abyei region to teach English to ninety teachers. It is very pleasing that we have found ways to reach out to some of the ‘forgotten’ people of this ancient land.