

Maryknoll leader urges reconciliation in South Sudan

Francis Njuguna Catholic News Service | Aug. 29, 2011

NAIROBI, Kenya -- The president of the U.S.-based Maryknoll Sisters urged leaders of the newly independent Republic of South Sudan to prioritize peacemaking and reconciliation within its national concerns.

Maryknoll Sister Janice McLaughlin also suggested that the fledgling country's leaders begin efforts to disarm and demobilization ex-combatants in South Sudan's militia.

Her recommendations came during an interview with Catholic News Service after she spent nearly three weeks in the country July 25 through Aug. 13 leading a series of workshops on conflict transformation.

The workshops were for nursing students, seminarians and radio broadcasters in both Diocese of Wau and the Archdiocese of Juba. She previously served as a missionary in Kenya, Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

"It is critical to provide skills training and employment possibilities for former fighters so they have means of making a living and contributing to rebuilding the nation," Sister Janice said. "If they feel left out and have no way to support themselves, they can easily turn to crime or to extortion to survive."

Counseling for trauma and other means to help people emotionally heal from the violence they have experienced also is needed, she said.

Sister Janice said she found most people hopeful and optimistic about the future. Young people in particular, she said, view South Sudan's independence as a miracle that they thought would never be realized in their lifetimes. People seem to be aware of the challenges ahead and realize that it will take united action to rebuild the war-torn country, she added.

She commended the new government under President Salva Kiir for establishing an anti-corruption body to prevent the misuse of funds.

The Catholic nun recalled that the Maryknoll community of priests, brothers, sisters and lay missionaries has been rendering pastoral services in the region since 1976, when the community was invited by the bishops of Sudan to start a pastoral institute in Juba, now South Sudan's capital.

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