

THE EPISCOPAL UNIVERSITY:

A NEW UNIVERSITY

FOR SOUTH SUDAN & SUDAN

Building Step By Step*Revd Dr Joseph Bilal*

Reflecting back on the achievements and challenges we have encountered since we started the university project (TEU) three years ago, it has become apparent that God is at work. For those who are concerned about the ongoing violence in South Sudan this may not always be apparent: the project may not seem viable or sustainable and throwing money at it may feel like pouring water down the drain. For many, it would make more sense to wait until peace is restored to embark on such an ambitious project.

However, conflicts like ours disrupt education but never stop it. There are children and young people in South Sudan who continue with their primary and secondary education, be it at the internally displaced and refugee camps or under a tree in the bush.

But we mustn't stop with primary and secondary education because economic growth and development require advanced knowledge and skills. History has shown us that the five decades of educational neglect by the regime in Khartoum during united Sudan left South Sudan under-developed. We have very few trained doctors, nurses, engineers, lawyers, teachers, business people and agriculturalists. Recently, the ministry of education had to hire secondary and primary school teachers from Zimbabwe to help the provision of quality education to



students. To rebuild our country, we continue to find the kind of skills we need from outside our country – from Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania.

Three weeks after my arrival to Juba on Sunday 15 December 2013, a war broke out between two rivals from one ruling party – the Sudan People Liberation Movement (SPLM). The reason for this fighting was a struggle for political power. Since then the war has continued to have devastating effects on human life and the country's economy.

In this situation, it would have been natural for the university's Project Management Board (PMB) to have responded by suspending the project. Surely only a fool would build a university tower just to have it smashed to the ground by battle tanks. Yet the PMB took a firm decision to continue with the work. They have learned from our history: Abandoning education means embracing a world of ignorance and chaos, and has long-term adverse impacts on the development and growth of our nation. In actuality, education is key to resolving our societal crises and to maintaining lasting peace.

Let's take a look at what we have achieved so far:

- We have completed the assessment of all but three of the 12 colleges we wanted to check for academic rigour. We plan to assess Lainya Vocational Training Institute (LVTI), Lui Nursing Institute and St. John College this coming year
- We have written a concept paper to describe our vision in more practical terms. The paper provides a detailed outline of the university's identity, ethos, vision, mission, goals and objective
- We have partially registered with the Directorate of Private and Foreign Universities, the government body that provides accreditation for private universities. This year we will undertake the necessary next steps to secure full accreditation
- In April 2016 we held a consultation meeting in Juba, which brought together more than 57 delegates from all over South Sudan and Sudan, including our partners from the UK. The purpose of the consultation was to build confidence in the future of the university, to confirm the collaborative manner in which this will take place, and to build commitment to agreed actions. A wide range of issues were discussed and recommendations provided for the project's action plan
- We have developed the charity and university websites and logo, and drawn up the budget for 2017/2018



Currently we are:

- Putting together the foundation programme for the first year
- Forming a task force to write a robust curriculum and the university governance policy
- Fundraising for the project, primarily via our UK registered charity 'The ECSSS University Partnership' (ECSSSUP)

Our next steps are:

- To launch the first phase of a big fundraising campaign so that we can achieve the next key stage of development. This will enable us to recruit staff, develop the compulsory foundation programme and first year curriculums, launch the foundation courses, build and/or renovate the office for TEU, and train some of the existing staff to a higher level degree (PhD and Masters)
- To continually update TEU website, complete the remaining institutional assessments, form the task force, consolidate the institutional assessments, collate the CVs from all the ECSSS institutions so that we can develop a profile for all the institutions that will become part of the university consortium

Although the situation in South Sudan is fragile, it is vital for us to get this university up and running so that we can contribute effectively to building peace and stability in the country. Education is the best answer to change the dynamics of violence in our country. However, the project requires our commitment, dedication and determination. It requires us to stand and work together to achieve our dream.