Pope Francis’ historic trips to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and South Sudan last month laid bare the utter poverty and suffering of the Congolese and South Sudanese people: material poverty as well as the poverty of peace. The Congregation of Bon Secours is intimately linked to the people of both countries through a personal presence in the DRC and through our membership in Friends in Solidarity with South Sudan.

This issue of JPIC News highlights Pope Francis’ presence to the Sudanese and Congolese people, his pastoral response to their suffering and his challenge to the rest of the world – especially the richer countries - not to turn a blind eye to the ongoing anguish these people are experiencing.

Presiding over Masses in both nations, Pope Francis begged the Congolese and South Sudanese people to lay down their arms, embrace mercy, and be missionaries of peace. He told them never to forget that Jesus knows their pain and loves them. Both messages are a challenge and a comfort to all of us.

“Your tears are my tears; your pain is my pain.”
To every family that grieves or is displaced by the burning of villages and other war crimes, to the survivors of sexual violence and to every injured child and adult, I say: I am with you; I want to bring you God’s caress.”

Pope Francis in the Democratic Republic of Congo

A Country Devoured by Violence
Continuous ethnic and political conflicts, fueled by illicit profits from the country’s extremely rich natural resources have displaced almost 4 million people in the DRC. There are more internally displaced people there than in any other country in Africa. More than 600,000 have fled to neighboring countries as refugees.

Congolese from the country’s violence-wracked east traveled to the capital of Kinshasa to tell the pope of the horrific violence they suffered for years as rebel groups sought to gain territory in the mineral-rich region through attacks that have forced more than 5 million people to flee their homes. Francis sat in silence as victim after victim came forward to tell their stories. He watched as they offered up at the foot of a crucifix a symbol of their pain: the machete used to maim and kill, or the straw bed mat on which they had been raped. When they knelt in front of him for a blessing, Francis placed his hand on their heads, or on the stumps of the arms that remained. Source: The Associated Press
One has the impression that the international community has practically resigned itself to the violence devouring Congo. We cannot grow accustomed to the bloodshed that has marked this country for decades, causing millions of deaths. While the international community has remained passive and silent, more than 10 million people have been horribly killed. 

— Pope Francis, Kinshasa

What a scandal and what hypocrisy, as people are being raped and killed, while the commerce that causes this violence and death continues to flourish. Enough! 

— Pope Francis, Kinshasa

You are part of a greater history, one that calls you to take an active role as a builder of communion, a champion of fraternity, an indomitable dreamer of a more united world. 

— Pope Francis to the Young People of the DRC

Responding the to Cry of the Those Who are Poor in South Sudan

An Invitation

The Sisters in the Congo are very conscious about the need for Sisters to volunteer for this new ministry to maintain our presence into the future. Please take this to heart and consider it in your personal prayer and discernment. As a Chapter Call we all bear some responsibility for the success of the mission and life of Bon Secours in the Congo. Are you being called to give a part of your life to live in the Congo? Are you being called to give some service to the Sisters presently in the Congo by volunteering some time, perhaps sharing a topic for discussion or prayer via Zoom? Are you being called to volunteer in your own unique creative way? Please speak with your Area Leader about ways that you might be feeling called! 

— CT Report, January 2023, Sr. Rosie

Pope Francis in South Sudan

Great numbers of children born in recent years have known only the reality of camps for displaced persons. They have no memory of what it means to have a home; they are losing their connection with their native land, their roots and their traditions. 

— Pope Francis, Juba, South Sudan

Never lose hope. And lose no opportunity to build peace. May hope and peace dwell among you. May hope and peace dwell in South Sudan! 

— Pope Francis to the people of South Sudan

Juba, South Sudan

More than 4.3 million people in South Sudan are estimated to need humanitarian assistance — the majority of whom are displaced or refugees.

— Sr. Mumbi Kigutha, President, Friends in Solidarity

Pope Francis meets a boy in an IDP camp in Juba. 

Source: Vatican Media

International Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation Committee

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Sr. Rosa Elena Lozada Escobar, CBS
Sr. Mary Beth Hamm, SSJ Chair
Sr. Mary Leamy, CBS
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