



MESSAGE FOR THE INDEPENDENCE ANNIVERSARY OF SOUTH SUDAN 2025

This is the day which Yahweh has made, a day for us to rejoice and be glad. We beg you, Lord, save us, we beg you give us redemption!
(Psalm 118:24-25)

Dear Brothers and Sisters of South Sudan

Independence Day is a powerful reminder of the resilience, courage, and unity that brought South Sudan into existence as an independent country. On July 9, 2011, we watched with great joy the flag of South Sudan being raised for the first time. A dream became true, the dream of all South Sudanese people who longed for freedom, dignity, and self-determination.

Therefore, how do we celebrate this day? We celebrate it with PRIDE because it was a unique achievement. Moreover, we celebrate with HUMILITY as well, as we recognise a long road still ahead of us. Independence gave us a country, but it is up to us to build a nation: a nation rooted in justice, unity, peace, and prosperity. As we read in Deuteronomy, nation building is linked with faithfulness and respect the dignity of human life: *“Today, I call heaven and earth to witness against you: I am offering you life or death, blessing or curse. Choose life, then, so that you and your descendants may live”* (Dt 30:19).

We cannot shy away from the challenges we still face. People carry deep scars, wounds, and traumas because of past conflict and communal violence. People have difficulty rising and standing with confidence because of the economic restraints. So many people are displaced or have found refuge abroad. In many cases, families are going through enormous difficulties, and some are broken. Too many citizens still lack access to basic services—healthcare, education, and clean water. Gross Domestic Product per capita in 2025 has ranked South Sudan as the world’s poorest country. Yet, the country has all the resources to do much better than that, provided there is peace and reliable institutions.

A proverb says that Hope is the last to die. Indeed, hope never disappoints when we commit ourselves to be that hope, with the help of God. Therefore, we celebrate Independence with HOPE. This year is also the jubilee of Hope. Hope in the strength of the youth, who have great dreams for their life and want to live in a peaceful nation. Hope in the resilience of the women of South Sudan, who carry communities even in the hardest times. Hope is in the voices of elders, who continue to call for reconciliation, dialogue, and understanding.

We must embrace peace not as an abstract idea – we so often speak of peace, but then make war – we must indeed embrace peace as a daily commitment — to speak with integrity, to lead with wisdom, to work with hope and trust, and to build bridges instead of walls, coexistence rather than division.

So, how do we celebrate independence? First, we must invest in peace. All people must be committed to peace, to disarmament, to nonviolence. Of course, peace demands truth and

accountability as well. Healing cannot begin without justice. Let us support national dialogue and reconciliation efforts that include all people of South Sudan from every community.

Second, we must commit to good governance. All people must be honest in their own office and work, exercising leadership to serve fellow citizens, looking for the common good of the entire nation rather than only one group. Corruption undermines the very foundation of our freedom. Institutions must be strengthened. The upcoming elections must be fair, credible, and peaceful—this is the paramount opportunity to shape our future.

Third, we must empower the people of South Sudan. Education is not a privilege—it is a right. Every child must have the opportunity to learn. Youth must be part of the solution, not sidelined or manipulated for sordid interests. Youth must not be left without education and without developing their critical mind and potentials. In addition, women must have a seat at every decision-making table; they must play a role in the peace and reconciliation process of our country. Moreover, let us not fear civil society, because any nation is rooted in the quality of its citizens.

Fourth, the country must be united. It is South Sudan, not Yirol, Warrap, Gogrial, Twic, Ruweng, Bul Nuär, Bor, Duk, Fangak, Akobo or Nassir – friends and enemies. It is all South Sudan. The tribe or region where you come from must never define your worth or divide your hearts. You are South Sudanese before the tribe, clan, or party you belong to. Diversity is strength, if we really embrace it with determination. In the first letter to the Corinthians, St Paul reminds us about the diversity and the unity of gifts in the society: *“There are many different gifts, but it is always the same spirit. There are many different ways of serving, but it is always the same Lord. There are many different forms of activity, but in everybody it is the same God who is at work in them”* (1Cor 12:4-7). Therefore, languages and cultures would not divide the country, but enrich it with beauty and wisdom.

In addition, Brothers and Sisters, independence is not a destination. It is a journey. A journey we must walk together—with hope, with patience, and with determination. Let us renew our commitment today to build a country that is peaceful, inclusive, and just. A country where every citizen feels safe and can work and improve their life. A country that honours its past—and boldly shapes its future.

In conclusion, I leave you some questions to reflect upon. How can we promote a culture of peace in South Sudan? How can we overcome the idolatry of tribal belonging and land control? How can we value all people of South Sudan and work for the common good? How can we overcome marginalisation, inequalities, and injustices? What is the vision that leads us into a prosperous future for our nation? How can we live in hope?

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Happy Independence Day. May God bless South Sudan.

+ Christian Carlassare, Bishop of Bentiu and Apostolic Administrator of Rumbek