

The New Sudan Group

**History of the Comboni Missionaries
working in the
“Liberated Areas” of Sudan**

From

July 1st 1990 to December 31st 1998

By

Fr. Francesco Chemello Odiongo Gatwic, mccj.

INTRODUCTION

The Sudan.

The history of Sudan has always been very difficult and troubled since the time of our founder St. Daniel Comboni. He himself had to say that the Central African Mission is “the most interesting mission of the world”¹ and also “one the most difficult and challenging missions”². This reality continued until our present days especially in South Sudan and, in order to keep it going, we sons and daughters of Comboni, had to find always new ways according to the historical situations, but always guided by the same spirit of love and dedication with which our Founder himself carried it out. The “Cross”³ born every day and the love springing out from the “pierced heart of Jesus”⁴ which “beats also for the Africans”⁵ were the

¹ Writings no. 981 I realise that the Central African Mission is the most interesting mission in the world. N. 131 (126) – TO FR FRANCESCO BRICOLO *ACR, A, c. 14/9*. Paris, 22/1 = 65; No. 3006.

² - 5897, “The foundation at Verona, which has the purpose of testing vocations and preparing candidates for a spirit of sacrifice and the apostolic virtues required of those who work for the Gospel in the holy but arduous Central African Mission, is of the greatest importance.” N. 898 (855) – TO CARDINAL GIOVANNI SIMEONI *AP SC Collegi d'Italia, ff. 1265–1266*. N. 2. Verona, African Institute, 16 January 1880

- 6338 “One of the most challenging, difficult, sublime and important in the world is certainly our Central African Mission.” N. 1005 (963) TO CARDINAL LUIGI DI CANOSSA *ACR, A, c. 18/38*. REPORT ON THE FAMINE AND PLAGUE of Central Africa in 1878–79

³ Writings no. 1982, 1555, 1621, 1673, 1710,

⁴ 3136, 3170, 3202, 3203, 3207, 3250, 3412,

⁵ 6381 “The most Sacred Heart of Jesus also beat for the poor Africans.”

only reasons of all our commitment, dedication, sufferings and joys.

This was precisely the reason of existence of the ***“NEW SUDAN GROUP”*** in a time when the South Sudanese people were persecuted, humiliated, harassed and killed in a genocide-like war in South Sudan. It became necessary to take clear decisions on how to become for them “signs of hope”, signs of the loving, reassuring and saving presence of God among them in their atrocious situations.

The present historical account will give an insight of how the above desire to be “signs of hope”, by being beside them and at their service like Jesus, has developed along that period of war. This account will just take up the period of time from the very start of the “New Sudan Group” in July 1990 and its development until the end of year 1998. Other people will carry on with the history of the years which follow.

Fr. Francesco Chemello Odiongo Gatwic,⁶ mccj.

⁶ Odiongo (Lotuko) = born at the time of harvest; Gatwic (Nuer) = son of the village, citizen, “one of us”.

The “NEW SUDAN GROUP”

The “NEW SUDAN GROUP”⁷ was set up by the General Superior, the Rev. Fr. Francesco Pierli and his Council⁸ with its starting from the 1st of July 1990,⁹ in the general consulta which took place in Rome from the 14th of June to the 7th of July 1990¹⁰. At the time, Fr. Abele Mödi, provincial superior of the “Province of South Sudan”, was also in Rome.¹¹ This was a good chance to reflect in depth on how to take care of the people who found themselves to be living in the areas of South Sudan controlled by SPLA/M.¹² Mgr. Paride Taban, Bishop of Torit Diocese, since 1989¹³ had, in fact, asked for personnel for his diocese which was in the SPLA/M

⁷ “NEW SUDAN GROUP” is the title of the group belonging to the “Province of South Sudan” but with autonomous leadership, due to the war, to allow the work in the non-government areas under the SPLA/M army/movement control.

⁸ **Roma 20/07/90 = P. Venanzio Milani, Oggetto: Gruppo Diocesi Torit - Ai Confratelli P. Caligari,....**

“1. Con questa mia indirizzata a ciascuno di voi, a nome del Consiglio Generale, facendo seguito a quanto già brevemente pubblicato nella Famiglia Comboniana di Luglio/Agosto 90 (p.5), vi comunico che siete stati destinati alla diocesi di Torit per il servizio delle missioni di Isoke e Loa”.... “Come gruppo dipendete dal Consiglio Generale.”

⁹ The letter of Fr. Milani dated 20/07/1990 gives the official news of the erection of the “NEW SUDAN GROUP”.

¹⁰ The group of the “NEW SUDAN” was approved in the consulta with took place in Rome from the 14th of June to the 7th of July 1990. Fr. Venanzio Milani was put in charge to take the necessary steps for its implementation.

¹¹ **13/07/1990 = Lettera di Fr. Pierli Francesco, Sup. Gen. to Fr. Ignacio Iopez Toro:** *“Nel mese di Giugno, approfittando della presenza di P. Abele Modi, abbiamo riflettuto sull’impegno nella diocesi di Torit... Abbiamo deciso di dare a questa presenza un volto stabile mettendo a capo gruppo P. Eugenio Caligari.”*

¹² SPLA/M = Sudan People Liberation Army / Movement.

¹³ Ref. Fr. Eugenio Caligari, “CRONISTORIA”, MCCJ BULLETIN no. 172, October 1991, p. 11-14

controlled areas, thus, a proper answer on the side of the General Council was needed.

As a follow up of this discernment, the General Superior Fr. Francesco Pierli and his Council, with the encouragement of the SCEP (Sacred Congregation for the Evangelisation of People), the Nuncio, other Bishops and people,¹⁴ thought that the presence of the Comboni Missionary personnel in the SPLA/M areas was of utmost importance, and so they took the decision of giving to the presence of the Comboni group working in Torit Diocese¹⁵ **“a stable face”**¹⁶ by putting as its **“Coordinator”** superior in charge of the **“NEW SUDAN GROUP”** Fr. Eugenio Caligari.

Thus, the General Superior and his Council, on the 20/07/1990, appointed to the diocese of Torit the following confreres:

Fr. Caligari Eugenio, Fr. Ukello Joseph Yala, Fr. José Flores, Fr. López Toro Ignacio, Fr. Giovanni Ferrazin, Fr. Mario Riva, Bro. Domenico Cariolato.

¹⁴ Ref. Fr. Venanzio Milani, (PRESENZA NEL NEW SUDAN) “Lettera ai confratelli destinati alla diocesi di Torit”, Roma 20/07/1990, MCCJ BULLETIN no. 172, October 1991, pp. 10-11.

¹⁵ **Roma 21/07/1990 P. Venanzio Milani to Rt. Rev. Mons. Paride Taban, Bishop of Torit.** *“I am writing this letter on behalf of the General Council.... We have appointed Fr. E. Caligari as the leader of the group and he will act as delegate of the Assistant General for Africa (the undersigned)..... Since there is now an official group leader, Fr. Kizito is no longer in charge of the ‘official’ contacts with your diocese....”*

¹⁶ **13/07/1990 = Lettera di Fr. Pierli Francesco, Sup. Gen. to Fr. Ignacio Lopez Toro:** *“Abbiamo deciso di dare a questa presenza un volto stabile mettendo a capo gruppo P. Eugenio Caligari.” “Tu continui nella diocesi di Torit, assegnato al Gruppo del “Liberated Sudan.” “Tu e P. Flores siete gli iniziatori di questa nuova presenza”*

Fr. José Flores and Fr. Ignacio López Toro were already **in Isoke Parish** since the 1st of May 1990. Fr. J. Ukello would reach **Torit** a bit later, and in August would reach there Fr. E. Caligari and Bro. D. Cariolato for **Loa Parish**; then in October would reach the “New Sudan” the Frs. M. Riva and G. Ferrazin.¹⁷

Thus, Torit Diocese in Eastern Equatoria, with Bishop Paride Taban, was the first diocese in the South opening the way for the presence of the Comboni Missionaries and of other Religious Missionaries and Church Personnel in the SPLA/M controlled areas. Central Equatoria and Western Equatoria were still under Khartoum government control.

However, with the SPLA offensive at the fall of 1990, also Western Equatoria fell under SPLA/M control and by the end of the year many people, included the Combonis, and all Church personnel and many people of Tombura/Yambio Diocese fled to Congo or to the Republic of Central Africa as refugees. The majority of our Comboni confreres and sisters returned to their countries of origin waiting for further decisions.

YEAR 1991: New Visit of Fr. V. Milani

In May 1991, Fr. Venanzio Milani was sent to visit the confreres of the “NEW SUDAN GROUP” in order to be personally aware of the situation and explore other ways of action in the “Liberated Areas” under the SPLA/M control. Their sharing and the dialogue with bishop Paride Taban, his Vicars and other pastoral agents, were a great help for the discernment at General Council level.

¹⁷ Ibid. Fr. G. Ferrazin had to go back to Italy for health reasons.

It was out of this visit that the General Superior Fr. Francesco Pierli and his Council came to the resolution of strengthening the presence in the “Liberated Areas” by assigning new personnel to the “NEW SUDAN GROUP”. The decision at this point was not only for the personnel in the Diocese of Torit, but also for that in the Diocese of Rumbek with Mgr. Cesare Mazzolari and the one in Tobura/Yambio with Bishop Joseph Gasi Abangite.

Fr. Venanzio Milani, recalling the content of his letter dated 20/07.1990, writes to the confreres of the “New Sudan Group” telling them what was still valid and to be followed of the former letter and what was new and to be implemented also in the two new locations of YIROL, (Rumbek Diocese) and NZARA (T/Yambio Diocese).¹⁸ He stressed very much the “new spirit” which should inform the members of the Comboni group in the relationship among themselves, with the Dioceses and the church personnel and with people in their difficult situation of life.¹⁹

Fr. V. Milani, in the name of the General Council, pointed out clearly that the most important reason of the presence of the Comboni group in the “New Sudan / Liberated Areas” was to be **“witnesses of love and solidarity”** with our South Sudanese brothers and sisters proved by the sufferings of war, **“signs of hope and trust in a better future”**.²⁰ For this reason he gave some practical guidelines regarding community and apostolic life.

¹⁸ Ref. Fr. Eugenio Caligari, “CRONISTORIA”, MCCJ BULLETIN no. **172, October 1991**, p. 14

¹⁹ Ref. Fr. Venanzio Milani, “Lettera di P.V.Milani dopo la visita nel Nuovo Sudan (sintesi)” Roma, Maggio 1991” MCCJ BULLETIN no. **172, October 1991**, pp. 15-18

²⁰ Ibid.

The main stress on community life was to ***“evangelise as a community”*** as a way of “announcing Jesus in practice” and as a way of witnessing the ***“brotherly communion in the Spirit”*** which the Comboni Missionaries are called to proclaim and make it present among the people they evangelise. The community as a place where ***“the apostle is made and made new”***.

“We are intrinsic part and in full communion with the Local Church” then, regarding ***“apostolic life”***, without losing our specific, the stress is put on ***“communion and collaboration”*** with the “Local Church” as ***“a real necessity”***: ***“not working for, but working with”***. Due to the difficult situation, the formation of leaders becomes a real priority. “Activism and huge means” would not be advisable and working with “poor means” would be the best way to produce good fruits, though it may need more patience.²¹

Relationship with SPLA/M

The visit of Fr. V. Milani had also the specific aim to meet with the officials of the SPLA/M in order to clarify various matters related to our presence in the areas controlled by them and to assure respect and protection, when needed. The help of Fr. Kizito Sesana (Director of New People Magazine in Nairobi) was very important at the time, and so was the meeting with Mr. Lam Akol, the deputy of Dr. John Garang in the SPLA/M. The assurance, on SPLA/M side, that we would have been respected and allowed to work freely and safely, made our presence possible. The result of this new assurance were the new assignments of personnel from the General council to the “NEW SUDAN GROUP”.

²¹ Ibid.

1991 – New Personnel for the “NEW SUDAN GROUP”

In the year 1991 the confreres appointed by the General Council to the “NEW SUDAN GROUP”, starting from 01/07/1991, were the following eight ones:

Fr. Martinez Açevedo José Luis,
Fr. Chemello Francesco,²²
Fr. Cellana Elvio, (*retroactive appointment*),
Bro. Enriquez Sanchez David
Fr. Caramazza Giuseppe.

The other confreres like:

Fr. Pellerino Giuseppe
Fr. Benini Igino,
Bro. Fabris Valentino

they were also appointed to the group, but they were already working in Sudan or in Nzara before the end of 1990.

Together with the seven confreres appointed in 1990, the “NEW SUDAN GROUP” consisted in **15 people**, plus Mgr. Cesare Mazzolari, Apostolic administrator of Rumbek Diocese.

Once appointed, the above confreres reached their destinations in different times and according to their destinations, which now had become three: **Torit Diocese, Rumbek Diocese and Tombura/Yambio Diocese.**

Regarding Fr. Joseph Ukello, he was assigned “ad personam” to Torit Diocese and Bishop Paride Taban gave him the

²² 27/03/91 Letter of Fr. F. Pierli to Fr. Chemello: appointment to New Sudan starting from 01/07/1991

(Fr. Francesco Chemello, who just ended the renewal course in Rome and was coming from the province of Malawi/Zambia, was appointed to Isoke Parish from the 1st of July. He reached Isoke via Nairobi in August. That same month SPLA splat into two; the “Main Stream or Torit Group”, mainly Dinka under Dr. John Garang, and the Nassir Group, mainly Nuer and Shilluk, under Dr. Riek Machar, with a Shilluk, Lam Akol).

responsibility as Vicar General and Episcopal Vicar of Kapoeta, Chukudum and Buoya. He was staying in Chukudum with the diocesan priests.²³

TORIT DIOCESE:

ISOKE Parish

Fr. José Flores, Fr. Ignacio López Toro were already in Isoke Parish since May 1990 and did not know yet what their juridical status was in relation to the Province of South Sudan. That is the reason why Fr. Ignacio Toro wrote to the General Superior in order to get better light. Fr. Francesco Pierli answered with two letters: the first one of the 13/07/1990 confirmed the new status of the group and even admitted that both of them were the very first ones starting this new experience,²⁴ in his second letter of the 05/08/1990 he states that he should go on with his work in Torit Diocese.²⁵

Starting from 01/07/1991, **Fr. Francesco Chemello** was appointed to Isoke Parish. He will reach Nairobi, Kenya on the first half of August 1991. At the end of the month there was the news of the split within SPLA/M (28/08/1991), a very serious blow to the

²³ Ref. Fr. Eugenio Caligari, "CRONISTORIA", MCCJ BULLETIN no. **172, October 1991**, p. 13

²⁴ 13/07/1990 = Letter of Fr. Pierli Francesco, Sup. Gen. to Fr. Ignacio Lopez Toro: *"Abbiamo deciso di dare a questa presenza un volto stabile mettendo a capo gruppo P. Eugenio Caligari."* *"Tu continui nella diocesi di Torit, assegnato al Gruppo del "Liberated Sudan."* *"Tu e P. Flores siete gli iniziatori di questa nuova presenza"*

²⁵ 05/08/1990 = Letter of Fr. Pierli Francesco, Sup. Gen. to Fr. Ignacio Lopez Toro: *"Perciò tu sei impegnato nel lavoro della diocesi di Torit e un ritorno in altre diocesi del Sudan è senz'altro escluso."*

movement and its future. By road, together with Fr. Ignacio López Toro and Bro. Enriquez Sanchez David, he will reach Isoke in the middle of September. Bro. Enriquez will remain in Isoke until the opening of the new parish of Kimatong among the Buoya People. The Community of Isoke would consist in: **Fr. José Flores, Fr. Ignacio López Toro and Fr. Francesco Chemello.**

LOA Parish

Of the people appointed to Torit Diocese in 1990, Fr. Eugenio Caligari, Fr. Giovanni Ferrazin, Fr. Mario Riva and Bro. Domenico Cariolato were assigned to Loa Parish. Fr. Giovanni Ferrazin, anyway, could not continue due to health reasons and so Loa Parish remained with three confreres. Fr. E. Caligari was chosen as a chapter delegate and, during the summer 1991, he attended the General Chapter which was taking place that year in Rome. During that period a further reflection was made, on the request of Bishop Paride Taban, to open a new mission among the Buoya/Longarim people, near to Kapoeta, on the northern side of the road Torit-Kapoeta itself.

The agreement reached was that Loa Parish should be handed over to the diocese and the Comboni personnel in would go to start the new mission of Kimatong before the end of 1991. So it happened, but Fr. Mario Riva was changed and was appointed to Rumbek Diocese,²⁶ thus, leaving Loa with three people. At the end of October Fr. E. Caligari was in

²⁶ 29/09/91 Letter of Fr. E. Caligari from Rome, Luigi Lilio 80, to Fr. Mario Riva: “assigned to Yirol” and “Louis Martinez to Yirol January 1992”

Nairobi and by the beginning of November he made known his plan in order to implement the decision taken.²⁷ The “NEW SUDAN GROUP” held its meeting in Loa 18-20/11/1991.²⁸ The two new assistants of Fr. Caligari were elected (Fr. Francesco Chemello and Enriquez Sanchez) and then the parish was handed over.

KIMATONG Parish

Once Loa Parish was handed over, **Fr. E. Caligari, Bro. Domenico Cariolato and Bro. Enriquez Sanchez David** went to Chukudum preparing for the opening of the new mission which took place on the 30/12/1991²⁹ Bishop Paride presented officially the confreres to the Buoya people. This mission which should have been opened in 1964, before the expulsion of the missionaries, had a second chance now under SPLA/M control. **Fr. Giuseppe Caramazza**, already appointed in 1991, reached the place in January 1992. They were now four confreres.

Fr. Joseph Ukello Yala, as already mentioned above, was appointed to Torit Diocese “ad personam” in 1990 and carried on as Vicar General of the Diocese and Episcopal Vicar for Kapoeta, Chukudum and

²⁷ E. Caligari 6/11/91: *“partirò per Torit 08/11/91, andrò a Loa per consegnare la missione a P Julius Idda, poi a Chukudum e P. Mario Riva a Yiol....”*

²⁸ **Loa 18-20/11/1991**, Minutes of the meeting: *“Fr. Ukello is living in Chukudum Parish as Episcopal Vicar for Kapoeta, Chukudum and Buoya as previous agreement between General Council and the Bishop....Fr. F. Chemello is chosen as Superior of Isoke Community with immediate effect from today.....”*

²⁹ **30/12/1991** Bishop Paride Taban presents the members of the community to the Buoya people.

Buoya, based in Chukudum with the diocesan priests.³⁰

RUMBEK DIOCESE: Yirol Parish 1991

Mgr. Cesare Mazzolari, after the appointment of **Fr. Mario Riva, Fr. Giuseppe Pellerino, and Fr. José Luis Martinez**,³¹ started preparing the required material in order to start the presence in YIROL, a location not far away from the “Holy Cross”, the place of Daniel Comboni. Fr. Pellerino and Fr. Mario Riva, together with Mgr. Cesare Mazzolari, will reach Yirol in November 1991; Fr. José Luis Martinez, instead, will reach in January 1992.

TOMBURA/YAMBIO DIOCESE: Nzara Parish 1991

Fr. Elvio Cellana, Fr. Igino Benini, and Bro. Valentino Fabris were appointed to Nzara. Fr. Francesco Pierli on 20/07/1991 makes Fr. E. Cellana known that he appointed him to the “NEW SUDAN GROUP” starting from 01/07/1991 (retroactive).³²

³⁰ **Loa 18-20/11/1991**, Minutes of the meeting: “*Fr. Ukello is living in Chukudum Parish as Episcopal Vicar for Kapoeta, Chukudum and Buoya as previous agreement between General Council and the Bishop.*”

³¹ 29/09/91 Letter of Fr. Caligari to Fr. J.L. Martinez “*Fr. Caligari is leaving Rome*”

³² 20/07/1991, Letter of Fr. F. Pierli Sup. Gen. to Fr. E. Cellana (Fr. Cellana is in Troia) “*Ti sono infinitamente grato per la disponibilità a tornare in Sudan in questa circostanza così importante e così delicata che si è venuto a creare nella zona zande dopo gli eventi del Dicembre scorso....*” (cioè dic. 1990)

They started preparing what was necessary.³³ Fr. Igino Benini, with three Comboni Sisters, returned to Nzara on the 17/11/1991, while Fr. Elvio Cellana and Bro Valentino Fabris arrived on the 23/12/1991.³⁴ Bishop Joseph Gasi Abangite reached Yambio before Christmas as well. The community of Nzara was now complete, and Tombura/Yambio Diocese, heartened by the presence of their bishop, could now look forward with a new hope.

“L’esperienza di P. Caligari ed altri nel cosiddetto “nuovo Sudan’ nella diocesi di Torit è quanto mai positiva. Speriamo che questo possa avvenire anche nella zona zande.” “Una terza presenza sarà nella diocesi di Rumbek, a circa 70 Km da Rumbek stesso, con Mons. Mazzolari e una comunità comboniana sia maschile che femminile.” “La presenza della Chiesa di Cristo, di noi missionary, non è legata a nessun regime politico. Andiamo dove c’è la gente, soprattutto dove ci sono i più abbandonati e calpestati. Questa strategia, che è approvata pienamente dalla S.C. per l’Evangelizzazione dei Popoli, sottolinea la nostra opzione per il popolo. Per questa presenza nella zona zande tu sei l’uomo chiave.”

“Perciò ti assegno alla provincial del Sud Sudan, per la zona zande dal 1 luglio 1991. I membri della tua comunità saranno P. Benini e Fr. Fabris.”
³³ 29/09/91 Letter of Fr. E. Caligari to Mario Riva from Rome Luigi Lilio 80: *“the three of Nzara are preparing for Nzara....”*

³⁴ NZARA 03/01/92 Fr. E. Cellana to Fr. E. Caligari: *“Di P. Benini, Srs. Natalia, Milagro e Aurora sai già. Dopo 22 giorni di attesa, Fr. Valentino ed io siamo venuti da Nairobi a Nzara...Mons Gasi ha chiesto di venire. Così aspettativissimo dalla gente, è arrivato qui a Nzara per poi tornare con P. Matteo Samoza a Yambio.”* “Abbiamo trovato tutto aperto: hanno portato via tutto,perfino i chiodi ai quali appendevamo le immagini sacre e il calendario, e hanno spaccato quello che non potevano rimuovere, come il magnifico trapano...cercheremo di andare avanti di più con la gente....C’è timore che ci possano essere incursioni aeree con bombardamenti per ritorsione, per questo stiamo preparando dei rifugi.”

1992 – Situation of the MCCJ – the “NEW SUDAN GROUP” in January 1992

The situation of the Comboni “New Sudan Group” in January 1992 was the following:

ISOKE: Fr. J. Flores, Fr. Ignacio Lopez, Fr. F. Chemello.

KIMATONG: Fr. E. Caligari, Fr. G. Caramazza, Bro. D. Cariolato, Bro. Enrique Sanchez, and Fr. J. Ukello (resident in Chukudum).

YIROL: Fr. G. Pellerino, Fr. M. Riva, Fr. J.L.Martinez, lead by Mgr. C. Mazzolari.

NZARA: Fr. E. Cellana, Fr. I. Benini, Bro. V. Fabris.

A total of **14 confreres** plus the Apostolic administrator of Rumbek Mgr. C. Mazzolari and committed in 3 Dioceses, **TORIT, RUMBEK and T/YAMBIO.**

The year started with good promises and all the locations were very busy planning. The confreres of Isoke and Kimatong arranged a zonal meeting in Chukudum for their planning and also in order to share about the situation of the four locations with the “Co-ordinator”, Fr. E. Caligari, since his councillors, Fr. Francesco Chemello and Enriquez Sanchez, were both from the Torit group.

To keep in contact with Yirol and Nzara was a difficult task for Fr. E. Caligari; communication was not easy. Nairobi was the only place where links with the General Administration and with Yirol and Nzara were manageable and the only reference point also for serious health treatment.

The first three months were very active and busy in order to organise or re-organise our presence at pastoral and practical level, giving time for the study the language like Otuho, Buoya/Didinga and Dinka for the new confreres, but also for Fr. Caligari in the new set up. At level of language the confreres of Nzara were better off because they knew Zande already. However, as it was said before, the premises of the community were in a real mess and needed repairing and so it was at level of parish. Together with the re-organisation at pastoral level, the parish and the PALICA (Pastoral-Liturgical-Catechetical) centre, the bishop was asking to take care of the primary school as a top priority.

Bro. Valentino was very busy in the practical work of putting in order the premises and so Fr. Benini and Cellana for what regarded the pastoral activities: Fr. Benini occupied more at central level and Fr. Cellana visiting by bicycle the far away stations. The care of the school was responsibility of Fr. Cellana with the help of the Comboni Sisters who were engaged also in the field of health care and pastoral. Even though these difficulties were real, Nzara was the best settled place. The lack of personnel needed to follow up the various commitments was really felt and confreres took up the required work sometimes beyond their limits.

THE KENYA PROVINCE LOGISTICS

The logistics offered by the Kenya Province were of essential importance and, thanks to their availability and patience, the work in the “Liberated Areas” of South Sudan was possible. Though working hard, the group had to keep always a “low profile” in order not to put at risk the presence of confreres working in the government areas with the pretext that the Combonis were working “illegally” in the SPLA rebels areas.

Year 1992, as already said, started with good promises, but became a very difficult year for a two reasons:

First, because of the bad consequences of the internal division of SPLA and the fighting within themselves, thus weakening their military and psychological strength.

Second, because of the well organized and massive counter-offensive of the Government of Khartoum Forces intended not only to recapture the lost important centres in the south like Yirol, Torit and Kapoeta, but to recapture all the South and give the final blow to SPLA/M. This is precisely what started taking place.

1992 KHARTOUM DRY SEASON OFFENSIVE

Though the things seemed to have taken the right direction, by March, the news were reporting that Khartoum was putting up a military counter-offensive in order to recapture the places lost the previous year, which were precisely the areas where the “New Sudan Group” was working. All those places were really at the highest risk. Indeed Khartoum, taking advantage of the split within SPLA/M which weakened the movement, put up the biggest offensive aimed not only to recapture the lost territories, but also to wipe out completely the rebel movement as such.

On the 9th of March 1992, taking advantage of the collaboration of the so-called “Nassir Faction” the government took POCHALLA on the Ethiopian border. On the 13th of March, KAPOETA, the seat of local administration for the SPLA/Torit was indiscriminately bombed by the government army (it will fall on May 28th).

By April 1992, BOR was captured and on 11th April, after a week of bombing, YIROL was captured as well.

The government plan was becoming clear by the facts:

- attack Kapoeta, the SPLA logistics hub, from the east, thus preventing SPLA connections with Ethiopia and Kenya;
- assure the Bahr-El Ghazal connection from WAU to Yirol, clearing the Nile route allowing river and supplies from Malakal to Juba;
- finally, attack TORIT, (it will be captured on July 13, 1992),³⁵ thus clearing the way until Kapoeta and the Kenyan border.



³⁵ Human Right Watch: CIVILIAN DEVASTATION.
<http://www.hrw.org/reports/1993/sudan/>

In this situation the three Comboni locations, YIROL, KIMATONG, and ISOKE were just on the most critical situation. That is the reason why the General Council, although this plan was not known at the time, was rather concerned and was following the development attentively.

The greatest concern was for the community of Yirol. Fr. David Glenday sent a fax to Fr. G. Pellerino asking to leave Yirol immediately.³⁶ All were very surprised and thought there was no real immediate threat, so they were asking that, at least one or two, should remain there. However, considered again the matter, the Superior General reconfirmed the request to leave immediately the place, hoping that it will be only temporarily.³⁷

The General Superior's decision was right. The government, in fact, proceeded swiftly with its offensive and finally recaptured Yirol on April 11, after bombing it. Shambe, a Nile port for southern Bahr El Ghazal and an important crossroads for the SPLA's supply system, fell on April 14, also after bombing.³⁸ Later on, Mgr. Mazzolari admitted that, although very painful, the order to evacuate Yirol was the right decision or they would have been trapped there.

³⁶ **18 Marzo 1992 (Fax) Fr. D. Glenday, Sup. Gen. to Fr. Pellerino,** superior of Yirol Community: *"Scrivo a te ...per comunicare una decisione presa da me oggi....vi chiediamo di lasciare Yirol immediatamente Per favore comunicare a Mons Mazzolari che gli consigliamo fortemente di partire con voi."*

³⁷ **23 Marzo 1992 (Fax) Fr. D. Glenday, Sup. Gen. to Fr. Pellerino:** *"...P. Filippi ha fatto relazione delle conversazioni telefoniche avute con te e Mons. Cesare. Avendo considerato molto attentamente la cosa, con il consenso degli assistenti, confermo la decisione già presa, e cioè l'allontanamento (provvisorio, si spera) del gruppo comboniano di Yirol."*

³⁸ Human Right Watch: CIVILIAN DEVASTATION.
<http://www.hrw.org/reports/1993/sudan/>

The Torit group, instead, was going on with the pastoral work almost in a normal way and the situation did not appear to be so critical. In Kimatong the main concern was to build the most essential things needed in order that the Comboni community may settle there properly. Sometimes after the meeting of Chukudum, Fr. Caligari started planning to go to Nairobi so that he could follow the situation of Yirol and Nzara. At the end of March, Fr. Ignacio, who had been appointed parish priest of Isoke³⁹ in January, decided to go to Nairobi together with Bishop Paride for health reasons⁴⁰ and Fr. Chemello, although still new, tried to carry on with the planned pastoral work.⁴¹

In March, however, Fr. J. Flores, who was working in Ikotos, was prevented by the SPLA commander of the place to go to back because of security reasons.⁴² This was a big blow for him because he had to drop the already planned pastoral visit to the various centres. Luckily, after some time, he was allowed again to go back and this gave him new purpose. The Easter festivities went on well and so was the pastoral work. He was going back to Isoke only for the weekly community day, as for the agreed programme.

In Isoke, although the situation was normal, there were some issues which were creating uneasiness in the relationship with the military authorities of the place, but they were solved and the Easter festivities were celebrated with joy. The Kimatong community, thought it was good to go to Isoke to celebrate

³⁹ 30/01/1992 Bishop Paride: Fr. Ignacio = Parish Priest of Isoke Parish and Flores Pastor of Ikotos, "Quasi parish".

⁴⁰ 27/03/92 Fr. Chemello to Caligari: Fr. Ignacio to Nairobi for health reasons

⁴¹ 30/01/92 Appointment as Assistant Pastor of Isoke Parish (Taban Paride)

⁴² The "security reasons" were not the unsafety of the place but that the SPLA commander did not want a foreigner to be a witness of what was going on or passing through Ikotos.

the Holy week and Easter (19th of April) all together, since in Kimatong there was no “Christian Community” yet. Then they went back. Even though Kapoeta was heavily bombed on March 13th, the situation still seemed to be holding in the Torit areas.

Fr. G. Filippi reached Nairobi at the beginning of May on his visit to the “NEW SUDAN GROUP” and Fr. E. Galigari, by that time, was also in Nairobi arranging for his visit inside the “Liberated Areas”. Fr. Filippi could meet the confreres of Yirol in Nairobi and in the middle of May he could visit the “Torit group” in Isoke and Kimatong. In Isoke Fr. Filippi met with Fr. Flores and Fr. Chemello (Fr. Ignacio López was in Nairobi for health reasons). In Kimatong, accompanied by Fr. F. Chemello, he could meet Fr. G. Caramazza, Bro. D. Cariolato and Bro. Enriquez Sanches.

Thus, Fr. Filippi had the chance of meeting both communities in their places and each confrere personally. He shared about our Comboni presence and post-Chapter reflection and, of course, regarding the security situation in our locations. Given the fact that Fr. Caligari was required to remain in Nairobi, he asked Fr. Chemello to be the reference point of the “Torit group” in Fr. Caligari’s absence.

Once completed the visit to Kimatong, Fr. Chemello drove to Torit with Fr. Filippi who wanted to talk with Bishop Paride Taban and take the flight back to Nairobi. The situation around was very tense, people were trying to leave Torit for safer locations. The chartered plane which should have collected Fr. Filippi in Torit, for safety reasons, had to be cancelled and, in a radio message, he was told that the plane would pick him up at Kapoeta. It was already late evening and there was no other way than to drive back again through the same road and proceed to Kapoeta.

Fr. Filippi and Chemello travelled all the night for Kapoeta. The road was very bad and the speed very low. People were asking lifts out of Torit and one could immediately sense how heavy the situation was, still the hope of a positive outcome was there. Around two in the morning they reached Kapoeta Parish and were welcomed by the fathers, though nobody was expecting them at that time of the night. Their only desire was to be able to rest a bit. In the morning the chartered plane landed, the pilot was Mrs. Heather Stuart⁴³ of the Trackmark Ltd.

She apologized because of the change of programme and place and she told the reasons of the change: Torit was really insecure and to land there very risky in that circumstance. This gave the idea of how serious the situation already was. Once the plane took off, Fr. Chemello went back to Isoke Parish very concerned.

Fr. J. Ukello was in Chukudum during the visit of Fr. Filippi and could not be present at the meeting. He had just passed through Isoke with Bishop Paride some weeks before, and he was all right. Fr. Hector Ayon, at the time, was assigned to the Kenya province. He asked to visit his sick mother to

⁴³ Ms. Heather Stuart, with her Trackmark charter flight company, was a real expert and a daring pilot who completed many missions within South Sudan, frequently risking her very own life in rescue operations. Links in and out the “Liberated Areas” were possible because of her. She was frequently piloting personally the aircrafts into difficult situations and areas. Trackmark Ltd. was the most reliable charter-flight company flying into South Sudan from Wilson Airport (Nairobi). They could reach everywhere. Due to the Government of Khartoum ban for OLS (Operation Lifeline Sudan) to fly to certain unauthorised locations, especially in the case of religious people, the church personnel and the Comboni Missionaries were relying very much on Trackmark Ltd charter flights. During this time it was the only company venturing into South Sudan.

Chukudum and Fr. Filippi, through Fr. Mattia Bizzarro, in absence of the Provincial Fr. F. Mödi, out of Juba visiting the other communities, gave him permission, telling him to be in Nairobi at the end of May when Fr. Filippi, the provincials and Fr. Caligari⁴⁴ will meet.⁴⁵

Fr Hector went but the trip was very difficult and could not reach Nairobi as suggested. That is the reason of the concern of the General Council in another letter asking for news about Fr. Joseph Ukello and Fr. Hector Ayon.⁴⁶ At the time, both of them were in Chukudum but communications were difficult.

THE COMBONI TORIT GROUP

Kimatong and Isoke Events

By the middle of May the Government Forces of Khartoum were mounting a lot of pressure on Torit and it was clear that, sooner or later it would have fallen, though SPLA fought strongly to defend it. Kapoeta was at high risk, as well.

While the Confreres of Nzara had no difficulty and carried on normally their work with the possibility of referring themselves to Nairobi in case of emergency, the community

⁴⁴ **23/05/1992** Fr. E. Caligari to the Confreres: “...*I am very sorry not to be among you... Fr. Filippi and Fr. General decided that I remain here for a while... For the moment I will remain here in Nairobi to monitor the situation in the New Sudan and to deal with any help I can do for you.*”

⁴⁵ 16/02/1992 Fr. Bizzarro Mattia to Fr. Caligari: “*P. Abele è via da Juba da più di un mese. Tra le lettere arrivate oggi al provinciale c'è una anche di P. Filippi per P. Ettore Ayon in cui dà a P. Ettore il permesso di andare a Chukudum a trovare la mamma ammalata....gli raccomanda di tornare a Nairobi per la fine di Maggio quando i provinciali e te avete l'incontro con P. Filippi.*”

⁴⁶ 15/06/1992 Fr. Filippi to Caligari: “*nel report non si accenna affatto di P. Ukello e P. Hector Ayon, sapete qualcosa di loro? Che piani hanno? Siamo loro vicini e vorremmo avere notizie con regolarità se questo è possibile.*”

of Kimatong, instead, was in a very difficult situation because of the risk of the fall of Kapoeta: in that case they would have been completely cut off and locked-in with no escape way, since they were situated on the northern side of the road Torit-Kapoeta. So, due to such insecurity, and having received a message from Bishop Paride (coming from Rome), by the end of May, the confreres of Kimatong came to Isoke with the idea of proceeding to Uganda through Ikotos and Madi Opei.

Fr. Joseph Flores was on safari to Ikotos and busy preparing the children for the First Communion and Confirmation but he came to Isoke for the usual meeting and so all met together and shared views, but by late afternoon of May 29th he went back to Ikotos. In Isoke, then, remained Fr. Chemello and the three confreres of Kimatong. Fr. Chemello proposed to go personally to Torit the following day to talk to Bishop Paride Taban and then meet all the others in Ikotos for a final decision.⁴⁷

The same evening of May 29th all this planning was cut short by the arrival to Isoke of Fr. John Lohitu, one of the episcopal vicars, with a written radio message from the General Council⁴⁸ to withdraw immediately. He came to Isoke on purpose from Torit. Bishop Paride sent also his thanks and appreciation to the Comboni personnel.⁴⁹ Though for Isoke it seemed premature and, moreover, Fr. Flores had just left few

⁴⁷ One possible choice was that the Kimatong community could proceed to Uganda, while Fr. Flores and Chemello would still remain on their places longer. That was the intention of Fr. Chemello meeting the bishop.

⁴⁸ The radio message arrived to Bishop Paride through SPLA radio. The message contained the order to leave. Bishop Paride sent Fr. J. Lohutu to dispatch it on the 29th of May.

⁴⁹ **29/05/1992 Bishop Paride** to Comboni Father and Brothers of DOT. *"I wish to express on behalf of all our personnel our sincere thanks and deep appreciation.....We wish God's blessing and a safe journey. We secure our prayer."*

hours before for Ikotos, together with Fr. Lohitu, all had to take the final decision without him. (Actually, before reaching Isoke, Fr. Lohitu met him in Ikotos and informed him about the order/message, but he did not come back to Isoke).

There was no real possibility to evaluate independently the gravity of the situation, so all together just followed the order. Fr. Lohitu gave to one of the catechist the responsibility to look after the parish and the following morning all left very early, greeting only the few people around the compound with the catechists.

The trip was through Ikotos. The group met also Fr. Flores who wanted to remain and reluctantly accepted the injunction to withdraw all together. The SPLA commander told that there was no permission to go to Uganda through Madi Opei but only through Torit. The same information arrived, just at the same time, also from Bishop Paride⁵⁰ confirming everything. Thus, the group with their three Toyota Land Cruisers took off for Torit.

Once in Torit, the commander in charge of its defence, Cdr. Kuol Manyang Juk, after a tough dispute with Bishop Paride and the whole group, ordered the SPLA soldiers to commandeer the three Land Cruisers. All the group passed the night in the Bishop's house and the following morning, together with him, all met to evaluate the situation. Meanwhile, another radio message from the General Council reached the Bishop saying that, regarding Isoke, "the

⁵⁰ **30/05/1992 Letter of Bishop Paride to Comboni Isoke:** *"the official road we chose of Nimule Uganda road...through Torit"* (received in Ikotos 30/05/1992/CF).

confreres are free to assess the situation.”⁵¹ Now it was too late, the situation could not be reversed.

In order not to lose the confreres assigned to Torit Diocese, with Bishop Paride it was decided to write a letter to the General Council proposing to relocate the personnel in North Uganda to take care of the Sudanese refugees and the seminarians who escaped from Juba. Fr. Leo Traynor, the chancellor of Torit Diocese, took all five Combonis to Loa Mission, where they were kept there for one week (home prisoners? The SPLA commander said: “no, it is just a formality”). Sr. Giovannina Zucca and Sr. Agata Cantone were already there and so were two Maryknoll Lay Associate, Dr. Susan Nagele and Elizabeth (Liz) Mac. A week later all were allowed to go to Uganda (Gulu) and then they proceeded to Nairobi.

NAIROBI: The NEW SUDAN GROUP MEETS. “DISCERNMENT AND PROPOSAL: TO GO ON”

The second part of June and the first part of July all the displaced confreres of the New Sudan were all together in Nairobi, Ngong Rd. Kenya Provincial House, for the evaluation of the experience, report, discernment and proposals.⁵²

⁵¹ In fact, the radio message received on the 29th of May gave the order to leave with no specification. Bishop Paride thought it was for all Combonis (Kimatong and Isoke). On the 31st of May Bishop Paride showed Fr. Chemello the last radio message he received specifying that the former one was for Kimatong only. Isoke was free to decide. But this was now too late, our three land cruisers pick ups had been already commandeered. There was now no way of going back on the decision taken.

⁵² **Nairobi-Langata 19/06/92**, Minutes of the meeting held at Langata Scholasticate, for the General Council, led by Fr. Abele Mödi with the presence of Fr. Eugenio Caligari, Fr. Francesco Chemello, Fr. Giuseppe Caramazza, Fr. Giuseppe Pellerino, Fr. Ignacio Toro, Fr. Jose’ Flores, Fr.

Except the three people of Nzara plus Fr. Hector Ayon and Fr. Joseph Ukello, all the others (Yirol, Isoke and Kimatong) were in Nairobi, Fr. Caligari was there and so was Fr. Abele Modi, the Provincial of South Sudan. It seemed as if everything was over and the experience of the “New Sudan Group” closed. The main proposal from the General Council was to allow confreres free choice and, for those who wanted to carry on, just make a service in the refugee camps attached to the respective province bordering with Southern Sudan: Kenya, (Kakuma) Uganda, (Pakele/Adjumani), Congo, (Nzara).

The proposal did not convince the group because of former experiences on this line and also because it was clearly foreseen that those major provinces, although with all their good will, they would not feel fully engaged in the programme. These confreres would be just “an attachment” to those provinces and their help would just give a transitional “side help and support”, but not a real care for the Sudanese people so much scattered inside and outside Sudan. Thus, the group would not have the chance of mobility and choice according to the real needs of the Sudanese people.

“Where our South Sudanese people are, there we will be”

The group worked hard to share pros and cons searching inspirations from God and from the founder Daniel Comboni and it came out unanimously with the following conclusion:

“Where our South Sudanese people are, there we will be, where they will move, there we will move with them, if we

Luis Martinez, Bro Domenico Cariolato and Bro. Davide Enriquez. The main point was: *“We would like to have a group clearly identifiable as such, for a period of one year, even if some of us will be away for holidays”.....headed by a superior with full authority.”*

need to go out from one door, we will try to enter through another one. This can only be possible if we remain united and autonomous. So we need to propose to go on with our identity as the “NEW SUDAN GROUP”.

Along this line and with this spirit, the proposal went to the General Council. Fr. Caligari conveyed it and then proceeded to Italy, as he was due after he had assigned each confrere according to the former diocesan assignment. Some, however, had other assignments: Fr. Caramazza asked to be assigned to the Kenya Province for pastoral reasons, Fr. Ignatius also to Kenya for health reasons, Fr. Joseph Flores and Bro. David Sanchez to Mexico.

Fr. Caligari told the remaining confreres to wait for the final answer from Rome and referred that, meanwhile, Fr. Francesco Chemello should act as Co-ordinator.⁵³ In any case, they should work as shown here below, either united to the provinces or as a “New Sudan Group”.

The Rumbek Diocese Group in KAKUMA Refugee Camp: **Fr. Joseph Pellerino, Fr. Mario Riva** (Fr. Raphael Riel and Fr. Benjamin Madol - Diocesans - would be with them). **Mgr Cesare Mazzolari** would carry on finding ways to serve Rumbek.

The Torit Diocese Group in Pakele Adjumani refugee camps and St. Mary's seminary: **Fr. Francesco Chemello and Bro Domenico Cariolato.**

⁵³ **07/07/1992** Letter of Fr. Caligari to confreres: “*I write to you to communicate the decisions of the General Council about us, and to tell you that I have finished my service as “Incaricato” of our groupDuring the August consulta they will choose the new Superior of the group officially. For the moment Fr. Francesco Chemello will act.*” (acting coordinator)

In Chukudum **Fr. Joseph Ukello and Fr. Hector Ayon.**⁵⁴

The T/Yambio Diocese Group of Nzara Fr. Igino Benini, Fr. Elvio Cellana, Bro Valentino Fabris and Fr. Louis Martinez.

After the meeting all the confreres got ready to go to the respective destinations of appointment and Bro. Cariolato went for holidays to Italy. Fr. Chemello left for Kampala on the 28th of July and reached Pakele/Kocoa on the 30th. This was the new location where the seminarians of Torit diocese, and others who fled from Juba, were supposed to continue their minor seminary formation. Fr. Chemello got his insertion into the team of the seminary and the pastoral team who was supposed to work with all the refugees of South Sudan in the area.

From Moyo there was also Fr. Mario Busellato (Comboni) who was already caring for the Kuku/Bari-speaking refugees of Yei diocese since 1988. He was visiting them coming and going back from there. However, the new big number of refugees covering the area of Pakele-Adjumani was mainly from Torit diocese and bishop Paride Taban, in connection with Bishop Drandua of Arua diocese, organized that the personnel of Kocoa Seminary should also be part of the local pastoral team connected with Pakele and Adjumani parishes, with a programme of visiting and offering religious assistance to the different refugee groups in the different camps. They were mainly Madi, Acoli and Lotuko speaking.

⁵⁴ **15/07/1992 Fr. Caligari to Bishop Paride:** *“The Superior General and his Council in the coming August consulta will appoint officially the new superior of the group. In the meantime Fr. Francesco Chemello will be acting”*

While in Kocoa, Fr. Chemello tried to follow up the situation inside the Sudan border of Nimule, especially where the three IDP (Internally Displaced People) camps of Ame, Atepi and Ashwa were located, in order to see if there was any possibility of commitment for the future in this part of Torit Diocese.⁵⁵ Then, on the second half of August he went back to Nairobi to collect the second hand car which had just been bought for the ministry in Kocoa. He found out that, also in Juba (government area), the situation was very bad and that missionary personnel had to flee to Nairobi.⁵⁶ Archbishop Paolino Lokudu had to take position in front of the deteriorating situation.⁵⁷

From Nairobi Fr Chemello took the chance to visit the Community of Nzara.⁵⁸ in Yambio Diocese⁵⁹ from the 27/8 to

⁵⁵ **08/08/1992 Fr. F. Chemello to Fr. Filippi Gen. Council Roma:** Report of the visit to Displaced People Camps inside Sudan: Registered IDPC. Atepi (115.000), AME (56.000), ASWA (49.000). Main groups = Dinka & Nuer, minor groups: Lokoro, Shilluk, Lotuko etc. The reference point is Loa Parish.

⁵⁶ **23/08/1992, Nairobi** Fr. F. Chemello to Fr. Filippi: Notizie da Juba: Fr. O. Gelmini uscito con 4 secolari della Nostra Famiglia. Sono qui a Nairobi. Sr. Eugenia Comboniana e' ancora a Kampala. P. M. Bizzarro, P. T. Riebe, P. O.Sina, P.J. Aranda, P. T. Giuntoli, Fr. M. Rossignoli, Fr. M. Ragnoli e P. Albino Adot Oryem sono rimasti a Juba. I primi sette hanno avuto l'ordine della security di uscire entro il 23 Agosto. Per P. A. Oryem nessun ordine. Hanno deciso di uscire solo se forzati. In questo caso P. Albino Oryem rimarrebbe come responsabile di tutto dato che P. Mödi é a Khartoum. Anche 5 suore Comboniane hanno l'ordine di uscire entro il 23 Agosto (Sr. Giulia, Sr. Massima, Sr. Azezet, Sr. Miriam e Sr. Faisa).

⁵⁷ **18/08/1992,** Letter of Archbishop Paolino Lukudu Loro to His exc. Military Governor of Equatoria State – Juba, on behalf of missionary personnel requested to leave Juba.
10/07/92 S. Council of Churches: attacks of SPLA 6/7 June and 6/7July. Situation deteriorated. Civilian forced to leave their home.

⁵⁸ **11/09/1992, Report of Fr. F. Chemello to Fr. Filippi about Nzara Community,** T/Yambio Diocese.

the 05/9-1992, with an MSF chartered plane. Then, before going back to Uganda, he went to visit also the situation of the confreres working in the refugee camp of Kakuma in order to have an overall view of the situation in the places where the confreres were assigned and be able to give an adequate report to the General Council.⁶⁰

Once completed the visit to Kakuma, he went back to Pakele/Kocoo by car and carried on with the insertion into the life of the seminary and arranging the work of restructuring the buildings and planning together with the church personnel, both there and in the refugee camps. The church personnel working there were Diocesan Priests, Apostles of Jesus, Comboni Missionaries, Sacred Heart Sisters and the Missionary Sisters of Mary Mother of the Church.

Though the visit to the side of Rumbek Diocese was not yet possible, after the visits done to the above mentioned locations and the sharing done with the confreres, one could envisage a possible future with open possibilities of missionary work, both inside and outside Sudan.⁶¹, and this

⁵⁹ **07/09/1992, Report of Fr. F. Chemello to Fr. Filippi about Nzara:** Meeting with Fr. Matthew Samusa, Vic. General (Bishop Joseph Gasi went to Lusaka for the AMECEA meeting). Invitation to people priests and sisters to go back. Fr. Chemello met Bishop Gasi in Nairobi and reported about the visit.

⁶⁰ **16/09/1992, Report of Fr. F. Chemello to Fr. Filippi about KAKUMA Refugee Camp Kenya** (12-14/09/1992). They have been transferred from Lokichokio to Kakuma at the end of July 1992. (around 16.000 youth age 10-20 and 4.000 families.) At their service: Fr. Pellerino, Fr. Riva and Fr. Benjanin Madol.

⁶¹ **16/09/1992, Report of Fr. F. Chemello to Fr. Filippi** about a "Suggested" Configuration of the "NEW SUDAN MCCJ GROUP" *"Having gone around to visit our communities, refugee camps and displaced people's camps inside and outside the Sudan liberated areas (Nzara-Yambio, Loa-Ame-Atepi-Aswa, Pakele and Kakuma) and seen the other diocesan priests of Torit and Yambio dioceses move around inside*

was precisely the reason of the report to the General Council. Some helpful manners of procedure in the work were these: **“COMMUNION, ADAPTATION, SIMPLE SERVICE, SAFETY, MOBILITY.”**

THE “NEW SUDAN GROUP” to “REMAIN ONE”.

The Superior General Rev Fr. David Glenday and his Council accepted the July proposal. Although scattered in different places, the **“NEW SUDAN GROUP HAD TO REMAIN ONE”** and Fr. Francesco Chemello was assigned to be the **“New Coordinator”** of the Group.⁶² The **“NEW SUDAN**

and outside Sudan, “I can say that, in the present situation, it is possible to have communities INSIDE THE LIBERATED AREAS and it is also possible to VISIT them both BY LAND and BY AIR.” In case of unforeseen difficulties, if necessary, it is always possible for the same communities to go out safely either to KENYA or to UGANDA or to ZAIRE and CENTRAL AFRICA REPUBLIC.....The whole group feel that “The Group of the NEW SUDAN should be juridically united and have a precise configuration even though still logistically fluid”.....this juridical unity will allow to work and to make decisions which are more suitable to the situation in its development. This would keep also a UNITY OF ACTION which will certainly benefit the PEOPLEand the CONFRERES THEMSELVES who will not have the feeling of “dispersion”. Planning, then, can be done according to what the situation in its development requires, keeping in mind these possible guidelines: COMMUNION (in every undertaking both social and pastoral). ADAPTATION (to this uncertain situation), SIMPLE SERVICE (without big structures and means, “Be with and work more with people”), SAFETY (acting in togetherness...without risking beyond necessity), MOBILITY (readiness to move without too many problems according to the necessity). The most important factor is not the big things we do, and which might just create jealousy in such a situation, but “to be with people and be signs of Christ’s hope”.

⁶² **Rome 21/10/1992** Fr. David Glenday Gen. Superior To the provincial of South Sudan, Fr. Abele Mödi: **“I. We ask Fr. Abel Mödi to continue as Superior of the confreres belonging to South Sudan province for the time being. When his present term of office expires (on December 31st 1992), he will continue as my Delegate. We also ask the members of the present**

GROUP”, although only 10 in number, (11 with Mgr. Caesar Mazzolari) felt strengthened by the decision of the General Council and, though scattered and challenged by the whole situation of disarray in South Sudan, there was clearly a sign of a new vitality and purpose: *“Where the people are, so we will be”* a *“presence of hope”*.

NEW PLANNING

The most important achievement was that, the “New Sudan Group” had the freedom of making decisions in whatever was thought suitable for the work among the Sudanese People and would report to the General Council through Fr. Giuseppe Filippi. The Province of South Sudan was still there with Fr. Abele Modi as the provincial superior. He would keep the link with all the confreres in the government areas (government allowing his movements). The “New Sudan Group”, instead, would take care, according to its possibility, of the zones under the SPLA/M control. All with the purpose of working for the better service to the people in both areas.

It was clear, anyway, that without the collaboration and the support of the Kenya and Uganda provinces, the work of the “New Sudan Group” would have been practically impossible

Provincial Council to continue as his Councillors and Fr. Todd Riebe as the Vice-Superior of the group.”

“Regarding the confreres belonging to those communities at the service of the Sudanese Church in the so-called “New Sudan” (Nzara) or in the refugee camps (at present, Pakele and Kakuma), we are asking Fr. Francesco Chemello to serve as co-ordinator. In this capacity, we invite him: a) to keep in touch with and, when possible or necessary, visit these communities; b) to keep us in the General Council informed of the situation; c) to facilitate, as far as possible, relations between these communities and the provinces of Uganda and Kenya and the respective Procures, d) to keep in touch with the bishops in whose dioceses or with whose people our confreres work”.

because of lack of personnel and logistics. With their support, instead, it went on for all those long years of war. This is the reason why the New Sudan Group felt always very grateful to them since they enabled it to be **“near to the suffering people of South Sudan”**

But a real special thank goes to God and St. Daniel Comboni, for the light and courage the little group found during that June-July 1992 discernment to propose to **“remain an autonomous group”** from the same mentioned provinces in what regards decision making and choices of work and styles. The autonomy of the “New Sudan group” revealed itself as the right decision for a very demanding work in a very delicate security situation in need of close attention and monitoring on its development in the various geographical locations and on the social and spiritual needs of people.

PERSONNEL AT THE END OF 1992

At the end of 1992 the **“NEW SUDAN GROUP”** consisted of **11 confreres** (included *Mgr. Cesare Mazzolari, Apostolic Administrator of Rumbek*), 9 Priests and 2 Brothers.

AUT OF A DOOR, IN THOUGH ANOTHER ONE

“Strategic withdrawal...”, that is what SPLA was saying when they had to abandon a place or lose it, as part of the “guerrilla tactics”. Well, also the New Sudan Group had to apply a similar method to maintain the presence. If people had to move to safer places, also the confreres had to move elsewhere and to adapt to the changing situation. The need to abandon a certain place for a certain time may have arisen, while searching for other ways to go back to the people. **“Out of a door, in through another one.”**

This happened especially for Torit Diocese: bishop Paride shifted his seat from Torit to Nimule, then from Nimule to Narus). Similarly for Yei Diocese. Rumbek Diocese shifted from Rumbek to Yirol, then to Nairobi or Arua (in Uganda) while trying to explore possible safe locations both within and outside the diocesan boundaries. Immediately after the exit from Yirol, the personnel was employed at the service of the young refugees coming from Ethiopia who walked to Narus, then to Lokichokio (Kenya) and finally to Kakuma Refugee Camp.

RUMBEK DIOCESE

The first exploration inside the geographical boundaries of Rumbek Diocese, after the re-capture of Yirol, was done by Mgr. C. Mazzolari and Fr. Pellerino from 19/5 to 02/06-1992,⁶³ but the situation looked still too uncertain to make a decision on this line. In November 1992 there was another attempt and Fr. Chemello (from Kocoo) joined Mgr. C. Mazzolari who decided to visit “Aguran” with Fr. Mario Riva⁶⁴ and where Fr. Dominic Matong and Fr. Raphael Riel (diocesans) had temporarily placed themselves. The visit took place from 27/11 to 03/12-1992 and, as outcome, it was decided that the centre of the Mission would be located in Mapuordit, a few kilometres out of the main road for security reasons.

This brought a positive new development within the diocese of Rumbek and also the need of re-assigning Fr. Pellerino to

⁶³ 15/06/1992 Mgr. C. Mazzolari: reports of his journey to Aluaklual (Aguran) with Fr. Pellerino.

⁶⁴ **06/12/1992 Report of Mgr. Caesar. Mazzolari** on the journey into Southern Sudan with Fr. Francesco Chemello and Fr. Mario Riva from 27/11 to 03/12-1992.

be together with Fr. Raphael Riel. Unfortunately, Fr. Dominic Matong died in those months. Now other confreres were needed in order to start consolidating properly the evangelizing presence in this part of the diocese, while continuing with further explorations of other safe locations.⁶⁵

Fr. Joseph Pellerino ended the work with the refugees in Kakuma at the end of December 1992 and went to Mapuordit on February the 10th 1993. Fr. Michael Barton reached Mapuordit on March 17th 1993.⁶⁶ The main work was pastoral and educational. Fr. M. Barton was asked to start immediately with a primary school and he really took it at heart and with good result.⁶⁷ Yondu IDP (Internally Displaced People) Camp was also taken up as a new commitment and served by the Personnel of Rumbek diocese with Fr. Mario Riva and Bro. Ottorino Gelmini, with Arua as the reference place.

⁶⁵ 06/12/92 Fr. Chemello to Fr. Pellerino: *"Sono tornato ieri dal viaggio ad Aguran con Mons Mazzolari e P. Riva.... Mons Mazzolari ha già inviato a Roma il report del viaggio.... Succintamente egli pensa a due Stazioni: una a YONDU CAMP (49.000 people 2.000 children school age) (15 km da Kaya) gran parte da Bor, Kongor e Yirol, - é in Yei Diocese, (Vescovo Ercolano Lado) P. Peter Dada é favorevole, e una ad AGURAN-MAPUORDIT (5 km a sud di Aguran)."*

⁶⁶ Rome 21/10/92 Fr. Filippi: Barton Michael assigned 01/01/1993 - Group of Mgr. Mazzolari.
(He arrived to Nairobi on the 5th of March and to Mapuordit the 17th /03/1993).

⁶⁷ In 1993 Fr. M. Barton started with the first year of primary and by 1998 he could have students ready to start the first year of secondary school. He really made the students work hard, with purpose and good results. In this way the most intelligent ones were able to advance in the upper stages in a quicker time. In Rumbek Diocese it was the most prominent school of the time.

STATUS OF PERSONNEL BY THE 10TH OF MARCH 1993⁶⁸

Comboni Communities of the “NEW SUDAN”

T/Yambio Diocese

1. **NZARA COMMUNITY:**
Comboni Missionaries, Nzara Parish
P.O.Box 21102, NAIROBI (Kenya)
Fr. Cellana Elvio (Superior)
Fr. Benini Igino⁶⁹
Fr. Martinez Acevedo Jose’ Luis
Bro. Fabris Valentino
(Account Procure of Nairobi)

Torit Diocese

1. **PAKELE/KOCOA COMMUNITY**
Comboni Missionaries, Pakele/Kocoa
P.O.Box 3, MOYO (Uganda)
Fr. Chemello Francesco (*Coordinator of the New Sudan Group*)
Bro. Cariolato Domenico⁷⁰
(Account Procure of Kampala)
2. **VICAR GENERAL TORIT DIOCESE**
Rev. Fr. Joseph Ukello Yala
Vicar General Torit Diocese
c/o Comboni Missionaries
P.O.Box 3872, KAMPALA (Uganda)

⁶⁸ **Date 10/03/1993 Status of Personnel:** Report of Fr. F. Chemello to Fr. Filippi Gen. Council Roma.

⁶⁹ 23rd Nov 1992, Fr. Benini was very sick, he urgently went back to Italy.

⁷⁰ Arrived on 17/09/92 to Pakele until December 1993, then went for Sabbatical.

Fr. Ayon Hector Oyiamute⁷¹ was for experience out of community attached to the diocese of Torit from 1992 to 1996.⁷² At the above date he was in Loa Parish.

Rumbek Diocese (Mgr. C. Mazzolari)

1. AGURAN COMMUNITY:
Comboni Missionaries, Aguran (Papuordit)
P.O.Box 30, ARUA (Uganda)
Fr. Pellerino Giuseppe
Fr. Barton Michael
(Account Procure of Kampala)
2. YONDU COMMUNITY:
Comboni Missionaries, Yondu
P.O.Box 30, ARUA (Uganda)
Fr. Riva Mario
Bro. Gelmini Ottorino⁷³
(Account Procure of Kampala)

⁷¹**Fr. Ayon Hector Oyiamute:** Born 1.1.44, Kapoeta, d. Juba (SD), T. 9.9.67 - P. 9.9.69 - O. 17.5.70. Firenze 65-67; Venegono 67-70; U **71-72; SS 72-84; FCM 84-86; SS 86-90; KE 90-91; SS 91-92; FCM 92-96; SS 96-**

⁷² Fr. Hector Ayon: 1992 returned to New Sudan, before the capture of Torit he went to Chukudum for Easter, after Easter, Chukudum Nagichot Ngatuba Lokichokio un foot.– ends to Nairobi
1993 to Loa with Fr Julio Ida, Yohannes Le Vachier, Fr. Leo Traynor. Then in Parajok, Lobonne (care of displaced people) Displaced People Camps, up to 1996.

⁷³ (Rome G.Filippi) After March 1993 Bro. Gelmini Ottorino will go with the group of Mgr. C. Mazzolari

PERSONNEL IN MARCH 1993

In March 1993 the “NEW SUDAN GROUP” consisted of **12 confreres** (included *Mgr. Cesare Mazzolari, Apostolic Administrator of Rumbek*), 9 Priests and 3 Brothers.

The Years 1993-1994

Years 1993 and 1994 were years of search for new possible locations of service and of hard work to consolidate the other locations where the work had already been started and where the security was going better, within South Sudan, in the refugee camps and in the other places set up in Kenya or Uganda as logistical reference points to enable the work within South Sudan to be carried out.

During this period of time what the “New Sudan Group” needed most was an increase of personnel. To get it from the general Council, the Coordinator had to show in practice and make them feel that, although the situation was difficult, nonetheless, it was possible to work with enough safety in the places where our commitments were. It was also very important to show that the set up of our commitments was allowing “enough normality” in the community life and that intercommunity meetings were also possible. So the choice of locations and the geographical viability among themselves was of utmost importance to reassure the General Council and receive new personnel.

Year 1993

The Khartoum offensive which started in 1992 was still on going and targeting especially the border places with Uganda and possibly western Equatoria. In Torit Diocese the Khartoum military forces reached the mission of Loa and threaten even Nimule, though without capturing it. The presence of the church remained there even though the security risk was high, however, Torit Diocese thought to transfer the seat of the diocese to Narus, on the eastern side of Eastern Equatoria, on the road Kapoeta - Lokichokio.

At the beginning of 1993 another delicate incident happened at the expenses of Fr. Joseph Ukello. He had already planned a visit and prayer to his home-place, Lafon, for Christmas 1992 but, due to lack of transport, he arrived on the 27th of December. The soldiers of CDR William Nyuon Bany, who had recently defected from SPLA, but who was not personally there at the time, were holding that area and captured Fr. J. Ukello, keeping him under arrest for more than a month. The risk was that he could be handed over to the Khartoum security in Juba. However, once CDR. William Nyuon returned to Lafon, he agreed to release Fr. J. Ukello who carried on normally with his duties in the diocese of Torit,⁷⁴ taking over the whole administration of Torit Diocese during the “sabbatical year” of Bishop Paride Taban.

⁷⁴ **01/03/1993 Bishop Paride to Church Personnel:** *“This is my message to inform you that I am leaving for a long retreat and a long bible sharing in Jerusalem... Fr. Joseph Ukello, the vicar generalwill take over the full administration of the diocese of Torit in my absence.”*

“Teody A. D. Lotto*You are a secretary and an employee of the Diocese of Torit”*

Annual Diocesan Meeting 27th Feb.-3rd March 1993: To SRRA Secretary General, Report presented by Bishop Paride Taban to CDR Lual Ding present SRRA Gen. Secret. Mario Mormor - Nimule 03/02/93.



Gulu: Pope John Paul II comes out of the hut prepared for him as sacristy.

VISIT OF POPE JOHN PAUL II TO GULU (N/Uganda)

At the beginning of 1993, a sign of great encouragement and hope, instead, was the visit of his holiness Pope John Paul II to Gulu on Saturday the 6th of February on his visit to Uganda, from the 5th to the 10th of February, 1993.⁷⁵ Many refugee people of Southern Sudan were present at the celebration, in particular the young seminarians of St. Mary Seminary of Kocoa.

The big banner with the words “Sudanese Refugees - St. Mary Seminary-Kocoa” could be seen by everybody and could not be hidden to the eyes of the Holy Father who took the chance, out of protocol, of addressing his word personally to the Sudanese refugees, to the students and the personnel of the seminary.

⁷⁵ Leadership Publications, 1993. “Visit of Pope John Paul II to Uganda: 5th to 10th February, 1993. Gulu, Kasese, Soroti,” Carlo Rodriguez, John Troy. - Totus Tuus <http://www.totus2us.com/universal/uganda/jpii-pilgrim-visit-1993/>

SOUTH-WESTERN BORDER

As for the south-western border with Uganda and Congo, the security was still holding and Rumbek Diocese went on implementing the plan presented to the General Council by starting the presence in Yondu IDP Camp, with logistic reference to Arua, West Nile (Uganda). Later on, the south-western border places became more and more under threat but not yet to the point of forceful withdrawal⁷⁶. Fr. F. Chemello and Bro. D. Cariolato had just completed their visit to Nzara mission, Yambio, Maridi, Mapuordit mission⁷⁷ and Yondu IDP Camp by car.

However, by August, the Khartoum offensive definitely started threatening also that border area. Yondu IDP Camp had to be abandoned and Kaya was captured. The people flooded the Ugandan areas around Koboko and the Comboni Confreres of Kocoa tried to help in this emergency situation in relationship with Mgr. Peter Dada, Vicar General of Yei Diocese in Northern Uganda. For Rumbek Diocese this was another painful set back. New explorations to other safer locations needed to be done.

⁷⁶ 09/07 1993 Fr. Chemello to Frs. Pellerino and Barton: *"I am just coming from Kaya where I went with Msgr. Mazzolari to enquire about the last developments on the field. There were apprehensions.... We found, however that the situation is "under control"*.

⁷⁷ The Co-ordinator, Fr. F. Chemello and Bro. Domenico Cariolato, from Kocoa by car, visited Nzara, Yambio, Maridi, Mapuordit and Yondu IDP Camp after Easter (12-25 April). They tried to go before Easter to avoid possible rainfalls but, in Kaya check point, the SPLA Security people did not accept, though still valid, the permit of Bro. D. Cariolato. To have a new permit they had to go to Nairobi to renew it and try again after Easter. The importance of this trip was to show, practically, especially to the General council, that travelling by car inside those places was possible, and therefore the trip was of utmost importance.

Western Equatoria

Western Equatoria was a clear a target for the Khartoum offensive. After the visit of the Co-ordinator to the community of Nzara⁷⁸ by car, after Easter, from the 12th to the 25th of April, the situation kept holding without threat for a couple of months. Then, Western Equatoria as a whole and Yambio area became increasingly under threat, but the Khartoum military might seemed, by then, to have lost its teeth. Though Khartoum re-captured many key places, and also Kaya border area, it failed to get solidly the South under its control and it never reached Yambio and Tombura.

The rural areas were still under the SPLA control and, thus, the real purpose of the big Khartoum offensive which was to “eradicate completely” SPLA from the South, failed. The confreres and sisters of Nzara were really concerned by the threat and kept monitoring the situation. However, they felt there was no reason to withdraw. Instead, Fr. E. Cellana’s health was not good⁷⁹ and was told to go to Nairobi for rest and medical treatment.

On the side of Khartoum, Instead, the weight of the heavy fighting during the massive offensive had claimed a lot of lives of soldiers from the North. Many of them injured were crowding the hospital of Khartoum and Omdurman⁸⁰ showing

⁷⁸ 05/05/1993 Report of the Co-ordinator: Visit of Nzara, Aguran/Mapuordit, and Yondu/Arua, 12-25 April, from Pakele by car together with Bro. Domenico Cariolato (travelling is possible).

⁷⁹ 26/07/93 Nzara (Fr. F. Chemello to bishop Joseph Gasi) Fr. Cellana to come to Nairobi for rest for 20 days/one month before 15 september. 17/9/93 Order to come to Nairobi.

⁸⁰ “**Counterinsurgency in Southern Sudan: The Means to Win?**” by Roger C. Glickson. (*Roger C. Glickson* is a Political-Military Analyst with Science Applications International Corporation in Arlington, Virginia).

to the people of the North the real face of the war in the South, even though the civil and military authorities were trying to minimize the true losses. One can say that, for Khartoum, “the chance” was lost. Indeed they hold the places for few years, but its outcome could already be foreseen. And that was what happened few years later.

Year 1994

It started with the Comboni Plenary Assembly of the New Sudan Group which took place in Nzara on 26-27 January. Fr. David Glenday, Superior General, was present at the meeting. Though the number of confreres was not big, the assembly was a very important moment of sharing concerns, views and proposals within the small group and with the Superior General. Not only, but the fact that he had to travel within Sudan, it gave him the practical feeling that the situation was difficult but, with due care, it was also “manageable”. This was the most important achievement related to the possible appointment of more personnel.

Year 1994 was also a year of very intense search for new location especially in the areas of Rumbek Diocese. Several explorations were done in different places, within and outside the boundaries of the diocese, in particular, where the important centres of the past missionary era were located. The idea of Mgr. C. Mazzolari was to reactivate them. This was a noble cause, but those places were very well known also by Khartoum and were highly unsafe because they were regularly targeted and bombed by Khartoum military planes, especially

http://www.delta-search.com/?babsrc=HP_ss&mntrId=CCB6666D572640B8&affID=119357&tsp=5037

see paragraph: “AN OPERATIONAL ASSESSMENT: THE TACTICAL AND STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVES: Tactical Deficiency.”

with the Antonov⁸¹. So the crude reality was showing that, although with a weeping heart, a different approach had to be followed in this regard.

Among the tentative explorations were Thiet and Myen Abun by Fr. Mario Riva and Fr. Benjamin Madol. In both cases it revealed the precarious situation at level of security. In the latter case also “the rescue operation” was put at stake and the plane kept hostage. Only after a hard deal it was released with the passengers. The choice then went for “Marial Lou”. Fr. Benjamin Madol set there in September and Fr. Mario Riva followed later on with Fr. Mattia Bizzarro. Mgr. Caesar Mazzolari and Fr. F. Chemello visited the place at the beginning of October,⁸² with a great welcome on the side of the chief⁸³ and of the people. The place was confirmed as the second mission centre after Mapuordit.

THE INTERCAPITULAR ASSEMBLY - ROME

The summer Comboni Intercapitular Assembly in Rome was a very important moment to share widely about the situation in South Sudan. Fr. Abel Modi was there as the Provincial Superior of the province. Fr. F. Chemello, co-ordinator of the “New Sudan Group”, was invited as well by the General superior. The reality within the areas of the South under government of Khartoum and those under SPLA/M rule were tackled and discussed in depth.

⁸¹ The “Antonov” is a Russian cargo plane used by Khartoum Air Force as a bomber. It was extremely un-precise and its use was to create panic among the civilian population because it would just kill people indiscriminately. It was carrying and dropping conventional bombs, but frequently also barrels full of explosive and nails to be dropped indiscriminately.

⁸² Letter 03/11/94 Visit Marial Lou and Eucharistic Congress of NZARA

⁸³ ‘The Dinka chief welcomed us with these words: *“We really thought that God had abandoned us..., now we see you here, this is the sign that God has not abandoned us!”*’ (reported by Fr. F. Chemello).

The presence of the “Coordinator” was very important and a unique occasion in order to give direct report from the field and to answer direct questions on key issues regarding the work of the “New Sudan Group”, the value of its presence (both within the South and in the refugee camps), the need to increase the Comboni personnel, the security issue, the measures taken in order to be present without putting the personnel into excessive risk, how to handle possible emergency situations, the appointment of “younger confreres, even straight from the scholasticates”,⁸⁴ community life and meetings etc. The Coordinator felt the whole issue was heard with interest and attention, though its implementations required longer time and discernment.

EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS IN SUDAN – NZARA for the “LIBERATED AREAS”

A very important event for the “Liberated Areas” in 1994 was the Eucharistic Congress which took place at the end of October (soon after the visit of Marial Low in Rumbek Diocese) and which brought together the various Dioceses of the so called “New Sudan” through their chosen representatives. Except for the people of Tombura/Yambio, all the other representatives were flown to Nzara by plane and, therefore, they were very few, but it was a very important and meaningful historical and spiritual event because it was uniting together all the dioceses in the “Liberated Areas” of Sudan, showing that “communion” was possible also in such precarious situations..

The main work of organization in loco was responsibility of the hosting diocese of Tombura/Yambio and, since it was

⁸⁴ Verbally to the Coordinator of the group, Fr. Filippi made him understand that, in such situation, no young confrere would be appointed to the “New Sudan Group.”

taking place in the mission of Nzara, the main burden fell on the shoulders of the Comboni confreres and Sisters. The presence of the Eucharist is always a sign of the perpetual loving presence of Jesus among his chosen people, but in this particular time of the history of the “New Sudan”, it was also a powerful sign of the encouraging presence of Jesus among his “suffering people”, walking together with them. It was a strong sign of hope and of communion with the passion of Jesus, while waiting with faith for “his resurrection”.

NEW SUDAN GROUP: PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF DECEMBER

Year 1994 was concluded with the Plenary Assembly of the “New Sudan Group”, which took place in Nairobi from 12th to the 19th of December, at the Carmelite House - Langata. It was there that the unexpected news arrived that, the “New Sudan Group” had been promoted into a Delegation, “THE DELEGATION of SOUTH SUDAN”, with its starting from the 1st of January 1995. This changed all the former juridical set up of the Combonis in South Sudan.

THE NEW SUDAN GROUP becomes the “DELEGATION OF SOUTH SUDAN”

Suppression of the “South Sudan Province” and erection of the “Delegation of South Sudan”⁸⁵

⁸⁵ 15/10/94 General Council: Decree of Erection of the Delegation of South Sudan.

- 15/10/94 Document Concerning the creation of the Delegation of S. Sudan.

- 14/12/94 Fr. Alois Weiss to Fr. F. Chemello. The Superior General: Appoints Fr. F. Chemello, as the Delegate for South Sudan.

- 1st of January 1995. Juridical start of the Delegation.

- From the “Bollettino” 186 - 1995.

At the fall of 1994 the General Superior, Fr. David Glenday and his Council decided to suppress the “South Sudan Province” within the government areas and promote the so-called “NEW SUDAN GROUP” into the “DELEGATION OF SOUTH SUDAN”.

This new juridical set up implied also a new understanding regarding the fields of work within the Sudan itself. This was not to be understood as a work in “NORTHERN SUDAN” or in “SOUTHERN SUDAN”, but as a work in “GOVERNMENT” and “NON-GOVERNMENT” areas.

From now on the “DELEGATION of SOUTH SUDAN” would take care of the Sudanese people in the “Liberated SPLA/M and SSIM/A areas”⁸⁶, even in the NORTH like the Nuba Mountains and in the refugee camps outside Sudan, (e.g. Uganda) while the “PROVINCE OF KHARTOUM”⁸⁷ would take care of all the areas in the North and in the South under the control of the KHARTOUM GOVERNMENT like Juba, Wau, Raja and Malakal.

This new juridical set up gave the possibility of working in the respective areas without the risk of interference into Government and Non-Government areas and enable the two jurisdictions to consolidate the various initiatives taken and follow them up with regular visits without the fear of inaccessible permits. As for the SOUTH SUDAN DELEGATION everything had to be followed up from

⁸⁶ SPLA/M (Sudan People Liberation Army / Movement (Mainstream Torit Group). SSIM/A South Sudan Indipendence Movement / Army (Nassir Group).

⁸⁷ Example: The Nuba of South Kordofan under SPLA/M, though in the NORTH, they would be served by the South Sudan Delegation”. Instead, Juba, Wau, Malakal and Raja, though in the SOUTH, they would be served by the “Khartoum Province”.

Nairobi as the best logistic place already established since the starting of the “New Sudan Group”.

Fr. Francesco Chemello was appointed as the “SUPERIOR DELEGATE”, Fr. Joseph Pellerino and Bro. Hans Dieter Ritterbecks were chosen as his councillors. Fr. Joseph Pellerino was appointed as the VICE-DELEGATE⁸⁸. This juridical set up and the one related to the “fields of work” went on until the independence of South Sudan, when the geographical boundaries of the countries, the **“Republic of Sudan”** and the **“Republic of South Sudan”** became a fact.

The “DELEGATION OF SOUTH SUDAN”

While the group existed as “New Sudan Group”, the superior general, Fr. David Glenday, made it very clear through Fr. Giuseppe Filippi, the councillor in charge for Africa, that ***“no young personnel would be assigned to the group”***. The reason was the situation of disarray in which the group found itself to be working, with no specific locations and plans, except the one of following the people wherever they would be tossed by the war.

Truly, all this would have put young personnel at risk, the risk to get burned out at the start of their mission and be put in a situation of not being able to have a “normal” insertion into the life of the mission with a well planned community and pastoral work. The other reason was the “physical” risk of remaining trapped in locations without enough experience to fend by themselves in case of emergency. Thus, only experienced people already working in Sudan or with

⁸⁸ **17/06/1995 Curia Roma:** “Confirmation of the election of Fr. Giuseppe Pellerino as the “Vice –Delegate Superior”

previous missionary experience in other provinces would have been appointed.

This was good enough in a time of emergency, but not good enough and very restrictive for the development of an evangelisation opened to the future with new perspectives, new pastoral approaches and evangelisation attitudes. Younger people were needed in order to make this possible. But, how could the difficult situation be made viable in order to prepare the way also for the appointment of young personnel? This was the main concern of the Delegate and his Council.

THE SEARCH FOR A NEW STRATEGY

It was clear that a new strategy, already taken into consideration during the time of the “NEW SUDAN GROUP”, needed to be studied and worked upon seriously in order to make this possible.

The first thing was to make a plan where the communities would find concrete ways of relating among themselves, those within a same ethnic group and also the others through the visits of the “Coordinator”. The General council had to be shown that, although the situation in the “Liberated Areas” was hard and also precarious, nonetheless, it would not prevent the communities and the group to relate and share the Comboni life, and that, the risky situation would not be so risky to the point of preventing safe enough emergency evacuation, when necessary.

This implied a work of locating our missions in places where confreres could evacuate via land or by air with enough safety and in places at low risk of bombardment from Khartoum military aircrafts. It meant to abandon the traditional well

established centres, so well known to Khartoum as well, and start new ones “in the bush”, far away enough from the main roads and former well known centres, but with possible bush roads linking them.

This became a particular issue of friction especially with the Rumbek Diocese Group. Being Mgr. Mazzolari a person of “great heart” he tended to establish places in the most risky areas as they were certainly the “*most poor and abandoned people*”. However, as already said before, this approach was very good at level of concern and also for the “image abroad”, but surely at very high risk of failure. It was certainly not realistic for the development of a manageable strategy for the “South Sudan Delegation”. This approach would have hindered the establishing of a viable plan that would encourage the appointment of younger personnel to South Sudan, as such, but also personnel to the diocese of Rumbek, if so much scattered around.

In a couple of instances related to too far away places, our confreres really run the risk (eg. Nyamlell),⁸⁹ or would have run the risk (eg. Pariang)⁹⁰ to be trapped by the government

⁸⁹ At the end of 1994, Fr. J. Pellerino and Bro. D. Cariolato came out alive from Nyamlell only because of the firmness with which the local SPLA commander ordered them to follow another road than the usual one. “German Agro-Action”, instead, had one person killed because of an ambush of the militia long that way.

⁹⁰ Pariang place was alternatively held by different factions and highly insecure for a permanent presence of a community. This is what happened also with CCM Doctors from Turin, see: “THE ARAKIS PERIOD: 1992-98” <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/sudan1103/11.htm> (Quotation 227) “Since 1983, Ruweng (Panaru) County had been without any assistance from the outside world whatsoever. The security situation did not allow for any project to be implemented, even an emergency project, although the need was great. In 1993 and in 1994 it was assessed for civilian health and nutrition status by different agencies operating from the southern sector of Operation Lifeline Sudan. At the time relief airstrips were

militia or government troops without possibility of rescuing them. Moreover, all these places were out of Rumbek Diocese territory. It was clear that this planning, however generous, would have led nowhere. The only way of assisting those places was in a “*safari way*” and then back to safer locations. Moreover, considering the number of planes chartered by Rumbek Diocese, this last choice could have been viable, but surely not the other one.

Thus the “Co-ordinator/ Delegate” had to put some clear points of procedure: the first one had to be that the Comboni Communities had to be in a situation where they could inter-relate by land and safely be rescued in case of necessity. Then, in the case of Rumbek Diocese, that the communities should also be “within its boundaries” and finally, that without these efforts “*no new personnel would be given*”. Far-away places could always be served, as it was said, but in

in Nyarweng, Awet, Ruweng (Panaru) County, Western Upper Nile. Security continued to be the main problem for those wishing to bring help to the seriously ill population. In 1994 and 1995 the Italian medical NGO Comitato Collaborazione Medica (CCM) visited the area three times, bringing medicine and medical equipment, intending to build a hospital in the Padit area. In 1995 two CCM doctors were captured by a government militia and taken to Khartoum, bringing to an end the work of CCM in the area. Also as a result of denial of airstrip clearance from the government of Sudan, no NGOs visited the area between 1995 and January 1998, when an agency assessment team visited; a U.N. agency assessed food needs in December 1997. Human Rights Watch, *Behind the Red Line: Political Repression in Sudan*, pp. 334-38; Human Rights Watch, *Civilian Devastation*, pp. 149-51; Agency assessment, Padit, Ruweng County, Western Upper Nile, Sudan, January 23-February 2, 1998 (anonymity requested). (An alternative spelling for Padit is Padiet, used in the assessment.)”

a “safari way” of one or two weeks, when weather, circumstances and safe trips would allow.

The above principles were applied in practice. Thus the triangle **Mapuordit** (shifted from the former Aguran, along the main road, founded by Fr. Dominic Matong and Fr. Raphael Riel in January 1992), **Marial Lou** (founded by Fr. Benjamin Madol in September 1994 (shifted from Thiet, a centre frequently bombed) and, later on in May 1995, **Agang Rial** (near to Rumbek town which was still under government control, but far away enough to keep a safe distance) were the main Mission Centres within the boundaries of Rumbek Diocese and were also viable to safe communication by road.

The effort of working out a policy of air and road viability with enough safety and the possibility of relationship among communities, seemed to have convinced the General Superior and his council, especially after the visit of Fr. David Glenday to Nzara in January 1994, and even more after the visit of Fr. G. Filippi and M. Casillas (General Councillors) from the end of December 1995 to the 13th of January 1996. They saw personally that, after all, the situation in South Sudan was difficult and risky, but not impossible to “safe enough presence and movement” also in the case of appointment of younger personnel.

The first person to be appointed directly from the noviciate after his first profession was Fr. Michele Stragapede, a former diocesan priest with ten years of priestly experience in Italy.

MOVING AHEAD

After the erection of the “Delegation of South Sudan” younger personnel started to be appointed. Even Scholastics from Nairobi and Brothers from Nairobi Brother Centre were

asking and were allowed to have their holidays experience in South Sudan, with the chance to be later on appointed to the Delegation. That was wonderful and in order to allow them to have a “normal” introduction to the mission experience, true care was put that, within the Delegation, those security and community communication principles would be implemented everywhere we were present, in Rumbek Diocese, (Dinka people) in Torit Diocese (Toposa people) and Yambio Diocese (Azande people).

MALAKAL DIOCESE: “THE NUER QUEST”

Malakal town itself was in the Government area, but not so the rural areas. In 1995, Bishop Paride Taban responsible for the “Liberated Areas” of Malakal Diocese under the SSIM/A (South Sudan Indipendence Army/Movement – The Nassir Group) asked Fr. Francesco Chemello (Mccj Delegate) and Sr. Giovannina Zucca (CMS working in Kiriandongo Refugee Camp – Uganda) to visit Leer with him, following the request of Nuer Catholic Leaders to have Catholic Church Personnel in the Nuer Land.

Fr. Francesco Chemello, was very sceptical to the proposal of the Bishop because there was no personnel available at the time, so why to go? However, after the January Diocesan meeting of Torit Diocese in Chukudum, and after sharing again on the topic, Fr. Chemello accepted. The people supposed to go to Leer with Bishop Paride were: Fr. Matthew Howmann of the Mill Hill Fathers, Fr. Francesco Chemello, Sr. Giovannina Zucca, Sr. Maria Mazzocco (Comboni Sisters), plus Sr. Rita Scovia (MSMMC) of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Mother of the Church.

The “Trackmark Ltd. flight” was scheduled for Saturday, but was delayed until Sunday morning for mechanical reasons.

That night the travellers had put up in the OLS camp in Lokichokio⁹¹. The group took off at around 9,00 a.m. and reached Leer late morning. A huge crowd of Nuer people received them in an exceptional and very emotional way. Their joy was indescribable and the one of the guests as well.

THE NUER BACKGROUND

Some words of introduction in order to understand how the Nuer issue came about needs to be spent. In 1993, a certain Joseph Pal Mut and John Kuok Baluang were sent by the Nuer Catholic Community to Nairobi to ask for “Pastors” (Priests). Dr. Riek Machar offered them transport by plane to Nairobi because the issue of the presence of Catholics within the Presbyterian Protestant Community had become a real issue and the relationship critical. The Presbyterian Pastors were holding that the whole area was to be Protestant because of the British “*Missions Spheres*” assigning it to the Protestants and also that Catholics in “Upper Nile” had no real

⁹¹ Personal incident of Fr. F. Chemello:

“I drove the car from Chukudum to Loky. Along the way Sr. Giovannina felt sick and started vomiting, probably malaria or just bad road..., or bad drive. in Loky she was OK. Myself, instead, during the night I suffered a terrible gastric malaria, so strong that I could not reach even the toilet few metres away... In such a condition I started thinking that a trip on a small Caravan Plane, the following day, was not advisable at all! If in the plane would happen something like what happened during the night, I would probably “asphyxiate” everybody in that small plane without toilet. What to do? This was the only chance for Leer... While thinking at possible alternatives, I put my hands into my bag and I found a big “Uchumi Supermarket” plastic bag. An immediate inspiration came to my mind: I went immediately to one of the OLS toilets, took three toilet papers rolls, unrolled them into the plastic bag, made two holes for my legs and put them up binding the plastic bag onto my waist. “A perfect baby safety”. Like a baby, in case of emergency, I was now safe, and so would have been the other passengers on the plane... Was it an inspiration from God for the Nuer cause?... I do not know, but the trip was possible...and the issue went on...”

hierarchical structures: in fact, “where are their Pastors?”, they said.

CALLING FOR PRIESTS

In front of this challenge the Catholic lay leaders (Catechists?) answered that they are not there, but they can call them. So Dr. Riek Machar, who had to solve the case, invited them to go to Nairobi and call them. He offered them air transport, they reached Nairobi and were accommodated in the “New People Media Centre”. Fr. Kizito Sesana and Fr. Paul Donohue took care of them. Nobody would believe that in the Protestant Nuer land there were many Catholic People. They were interviewed separately in order to see if their stories were reliable or not. At the end, the interviewers were convinced about the reliability of their accounts and so they decided to go and see.

From Nairobi, Fr. Paul Donohue and Fr. R. Kizito Sesana went and could confirm the truthfulness of Joseph Pal Mut⁹² and John Kuok Baluang’s accounts. A passionate article about their visit and the NUER people of Leer was written and spread around the media. The bishop of Torit, Mgr. Paride Taban, who was already following the Nuer issue, moved on organizing how to help their situation, both pastorally and through reliefs. This is how the Comboni Missionaries got involved, as well.

⁹² di Kizito Sesana, foto di Gian Marco Elia da Nairobi

<http://web.peacelink.it/nuba2.html>

Priest-parched in Sudan: against all odds, catechists convert thousands.

<http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Priest-parched+in+Sudan%3A+against+all+odds,+catechists+convert...-a017839238>

LEER EXPERIENCE

All receptions in the South Sudanese cultures are wonderful, but the Leer reception overtook all the others. That Sunday morning a huge crowd of Nuer people was there at the airstrip for hours (the flight was late) to receive Bishop Paride Taban and the people going with him.⁹³ It was a very exceptional and very emotional reception. The joy of the people was indescribable and also the one of the guests. The leaders confirmed that the people had walked for days and some for weeks, from all the corners of the Nuer Land, in order to reach Leer in time for the great event.

Indeed it was the greatest event on the Catholic Nuer history because, although Bishop Vincent Mojwok Nyiker gave the permission to Catechist James Duol Kai⁹⁴ of Adok al Bahr⁹⁵

⁹³ A witness account of Fr. Francesco Chemello: *“When our aircraft landed, a huge crowd of Nuer people was awaiting on the airstrip, and when we came down from the plane they surrounded us, greeted vigorously with songs, dances, women with their traditional ulates, children running everywhere. They accompanied us holding papyrus sleeping mats on top of our heads and, singing and dancing, they brought us to the grass hut where we sat down and were properly greeted and served at”..... “The big crowd of people was waiting with great commotion in the open air place prepared for the celebration of the Holy Mass where Baptism of children and adult people was supposed to take place, together with Confirmations and Holy Communions. People had travelled from very far-away places, like Waat and Akobo, and for many days to be present at this rare event with Bishop Paride Taban. The mass of people was so big that Bishop Paride asked Fr. Matthew and Fr. Francis to help him to minister the Confirmation”... “A great Pentecost”, exclaimed bishop Paride, “and a great mess as well”, I added!. But one thing which could not be denied was the great joy and faith of the Nuer Catholics who, from all over the Nuer land, came to Leer to witness their faith, their joy and their choice to follow Christ and to witness that the “Catholic Church” was already solid among Nuer People.”*

⁹⁴ James Duol Kai is the evangelizing founder (catechist) of the whole Adok area. Starting from Adok-Al-Bahr, on the river Nile until the Nyuon area which borders southwards with the historical “Holy Cross” of Comboni. He

and other ones to baptize people, he could not come from Malakal for an event like this, neither could he send priests. Thus, the presence of a Catholic bishop, was extremely meaningful for the Nuer Catholics and a witness that their claim to have “Priests” and other “Religious” to take pastoral care of them was a truthful right not to be denied.⁹⁶

The celebration of the Holy Eucharist was presided by Bishop Paride. There were hundreds of baptisms and numerous confirmations, with people fainting and bad spirits running away from possessed people. Joy and wonder were on the faces of all the people. Regarding the “Comboni position” in front of this event, it was clear to the Delegate and to Sr. Giovannina that “The Nuer Claim” could not be dropped. It was true, it was urgent and something had to be done! The question was: “how?” Personnel was very limited, the appointment of younger confreres still not ripe and the request from other dioceses very pressing.

was baptized Presbyterian but became a Catholic in Khartoum at the Brother Sergi Club. When in the seventies he went back to Adok-Al-Bahr, he started praying with his family in the way Catholic pray, especially with the holy rosary. Little by little people joined him and asked to be baptized, but he had no permission. So he went to Malakal to Bishop Vincent Mojwok who gave it to him. Back again to Adok he got many other requests from many other places. It was in this way that, together with other convert from Khartoum, he started founding many other Catholic centres and the Catholic Church spread everywhere in the “Western Nuer Areas”.⁹⁵ Adok-Al-Bahr main village is now called “Liap”. Most probably is that “Fandah Eliab” of the Comboni account on the Nuer people which we find in his Writings to Dr. Benedetto Patuzzi (ACR, A, c. 15/88) of the 15/3/1858, Writings nn.. 380-381, since there are no other big Nuer villages settled near to the river Nile at that latitude before the 7th degree north, from where Comboni was writing.

⁹⁶ For the work of the catechists in spreading the Catholic Church in the “Nuer Areas” see the book of (Fr.) Gonzalez Galarza, Fernando: “La maravillosa historia del inicio de la Iglesia y la evangelizacion del pueblo Nuer de Sudan”, p. 205 ; cm. 20, Misioneros Combonianos, Mexico, 2006. “An Amazing Story”- in English.

In the first meeting of the Council of the new “South Sudan Delegation” held in Nairobi in May 1995 there came up some few issues to be tackled, but the most important were the following:

1. How to continue to consolidate the policy of safety and communication among our communities in order to encourage the General Superior and his Council on the viability of appointment of young personnel to the Delegation.
2. To carry on with the above policy in the set up of Rumbek Diocese by adding “Agang Rial” as the third Comboni community.
3. To think about a “South Sudan Delegation” house in Nairobi for logistic reasons⁹⁷
4. About the “NUER Issue”: what to do?

Point number one was followed up and implemented as far as possible by the Delegate, Fr. Francesco Chemello in relationship to the Comboni Communities, especially when they started receiving young personnel. Point number two needed a sharp clarification with Monsignor Caesar Mazzolari, as already told above. The third point was quite clear with the Kenya province: they would carry on supporting the Delegation logistically with the procure, while the Delegation council would contact the General Council

⁹⁷ The generosity of Kenya Province House as a reference point for logistics was good, but with a possible increase of personnel, as a consequence of the erection of the Delegation, would have made the situation difficult and not viable any more. The other proposal from Mgr. Caesar Mazzolari to use the facilities of Rumbek Diocese in “Bethany House - Nairobi” was also not advisable since our personnel was working for other dioceses, as well, and it would have complicated the relationship instead of making it easier. The best solution was to take into consideration the need of having proper autonomous premises for the Delegation. This need became clearer and clearer.

about the feasibility of the Delegation having its own house. This issue was understood clearly by the General Council which agreed and gave the go ahead to look for it.

The forth issue, that is the Nuer one, after having found an open attitude from the General Superior and his Council, the Delegation Council decided to start working on it and follow up step by step its development to be implemented on a “safary way”, as proposed by Bishop Paride Taban. Bro. Hans Ritterbecks accepted to start working in the Nuer Project within the Torit Diocese plan and under the leadership of a Kenyan lay person⁹⁸ put in charge of it by Bishop Paride Taban.

Unfortunately the plan suffered a real set back when the person in charge was threaten by some Nuer military people and he felt he had to withdraw. Bro. Hans, however, carried on setting up some logistics with Torit diocese in Lokichokio,⁹⁹ while waiting for possible developments. Bro. Hans himself went to Leer with Bishop Paride on that Christmas 1995 to confirm the positive will of the Delegation Council to proceed in whatever possible way. The real opportunity came in January 1996 when Fr. Antonio La Braca was appointed to the South Sudan Delegation and accepted to work among the Nuer.

⁹⁸ His name is not mentioned for privacy reasons.

⁹⁹ **09/02/1996, Fr. F. Chemello to Bishop Taban Paride** responsible for the “Upper Nile Project” Diocese of Malakal: *“In answer to your expectations, expressed in your letter of the 03/07/1995, to have Comboni Personnel involved in Malakal area, Bro. Ritterbecks Hans Dieter was appointed on 14/10/1995...”*

YEAR 1995: THE “SOUTH SUDAN DELEGATION”

Year 1995 was a very important one in the history of the “NEW SUDAN GROUP”. It showed that the work of evangelisation done in very difficult situations while walking with the suffering people of South Sudan, wherever it was possible, as a “sign of hope”, was the right one. The motivations for which the NEW SUDAN GROUP was started enabled the confreres to accompany the people, as it happened at the time of Moses, in the desert of the war with good results.

The stronger juridical set up gave to the group a better identity and therefore a stronger purpose in order to carry on with the work already started. On the side of the General Council, it was also a sign of their will and choice to strengthen the group with a stronger commitment regarding personnel and means in order to look to the future with more confidence. Year 1995, in fact, started by taking into account that, together with older confreres, also the younger one should not be ruled out completely. Fr. Michele Stragapede, as already said, was the first to open the way, others would follow.

By the end of 1995 the group had already grown consistently. A house for the Delegation was found in Lavington, Jacaranda Avenue,¹⁰⁰ Nairobi. It was bought with shared fund coming

¹⁰⁰ The Delegate took at heart seriously the matter of the house for the Delegation and, even before the OK of the General Council, he went to look all the areas not too far away from the provincial house of Kenya and Bethany house of Rumbek Diocese in order to keep easy connection with them in an area safe enough for confreres who needed rest from the tough Sudanese experiences. But that was a time where all NGOs and Agencies were looking for residences. The prices were high and all the existing houses on rent or for sell were very small or in need to be pulled down and be rebuilt from the scratch: too much work or too long time to get them ready.

from the members of the Delegation, from the General council and from the Province of Spain which accepted the request for help. By the first of September 1995, after the conclusion of all legal matters, the confreres who were guests of the Kenya Province in Ngong Road could step inside and permanently reside there and start the work of restoration and adaptation needed in the house.

The confreres inaugurating the new Comboni House in Jacaranda Avenue were: the Delegate, Fr. Francesco Chemello, Bro. Hans Dieter Ritterbecks, Fr. G.B. Zanardi, Fr. Alfonso Polacchini, Bro. Ambrogio Confalonieri and Fr. Michele Stragapede. The house started its work immediately.

When the OK from the General Superior came, this is what Fr. F. Chemello shared about it: *"I started a novena to our founder Daniel Comboni and started going around looking now "literally" house by house for many days. There were good plots but very far away in the countryside and in no very safe areas. Moreover they needed to be built up from the scratch... No way! That Saturday I went to see the side of Lavington, Jacaranda Avenue. I was very tired and discouraged, I looked at the watch and it was already past 12. Done !, I go home, have lunch and go to rest! I pressed on the accelerator and got speed....*

My eyes were looking at the jacaranda trees when I saw a sign on the gate of a house: "For Sell". I did not bother, I went on with speed. However, my brain kept still the image of the house and automatically evaluated it as looking good. In a doubtful mood I stopped, I reversed, and went for a better check. Truly the external appearance was good and recently built. I parked the car and asked to enter. I talked with the owner who led me inside the house itself. The family was still there. I greeted them and went around to check. I immediately thought that the house, with some few adaptations, would be the proper one for us and with immediate use. I told the owner I would come back the same afternoon with somebody else.

"Never rush too much!" I told myself, but we needed to speed up. I went to the Kenya Provincial House, had late lunch quickly, called Fr. Fernando Colombo, the provincial of Kenya, and asked him to come immediately with me to see it. We went, he was also positive about it, I thought: 'this is it!'. When we went back home I realized it was the last day of my novena.... Of course, a better evaluation and time was needed to finalize all the matters, but 'that was it', Jacaranda House."

Fr. Chemello and Fr. Stragapede started preparing the food and all got “the first supper” in the “Jacaranda Delegation House.”

CONSOLIDATING THE EXISTING AND STARTING NEW POSTS

In Torit Diocese the SS.Delegation had two commitments:

1. KOCHOA St. Mary’s Seminary (Northern Uganda) with the commitment in the refugee camps of Pakele-Adjumani since July 1992. With Bro. M. Rossignoli (October 1993), Fr. A. Mattevi (Since April 1994).
2. NARUS, in Eastern part of Eastern Equatoria, new temporary seat of Torit Diocese and pastoral work among the Toposa People. Since the arrival of Fr. Elia Ciapetti (end 1993).

In Tombura/Yambio Diocese one commitment:

1. NZARA, since November 1991 with Pastoral work, PALICA Centre, Primary and Intermediate schools. Fr. E. Cellana, Bro. V. Fabris, Fr. J.L.Martinez, Horácio Ribeiro Rossas.¹⁰¹

In Rumbek Diocese three commitments:

(Mgr. C. Mazzolari)

1. MAPUORDIT: Fr. J. Pellerino, M. Barton, (Fr. Raphael Riel-Dioc.) and, on temporary bases, Fr. Claudio Lurati from 14 April until August 1995.¹⁰²
2. MARIAL LOU: (Fr. Benjamin Madol - Dioc.- Sept. 1994), Fr. Mario Riva (Oct. 1994), Fr. M. Bizzarro

¹⁰¹ Appointed starting from 01/07/1995. In NZARA until 01/07/1998.

¹⁰² Fr. C. Lurati, from Mapuordit went to visit by car Agang Rial and Marial Lou. This was very important and it showed that, if there is good will, the three communities can plan regular meetings among themselves without any big problem.

(Dec 1994). He was previously appointed to Mapuordit since 29/10/94.

3. AGANG RIAL: Fr. J. Pellerino (July 1995), Bro. D. Cariolato (July 1995), Fr. M. Stragapede.¹⁰³ (August 1995).
4. Fr. Kizito Sesana works with Rumbek Diocese juridically “Out of Community”¹⁰⁴

In Malakal Diocese “Liberated Areas” (Under the care of Torit Diocese)

1. One possible commitment at “safari style”
- Bro. Hans Dieter Ritterbecks (14 October 1995)

NAIROBI: Delegation House in Jacaranda Avenue.

The Delegate Fr. Francesco Chemello, Fr. Alfonso Polacchini, (Local Superior), Fr. G.B. Zanardi and Bro. A. Confalonieri (July 1995).

RADICAL MEMBERS - SOUTH SUDANESE CONFRERES:

Serving the mission in other provinces at the start of the SS. Delegation: Fr. Mödi Abel Nyorko,¹⁰⁵ Fr.

¹⁰³ Fr. M. Stragapede:

15 March 1994 Appointment of to the SS.Delegation.

30/05/94 Fr. Chemello visits him at Venegono for his 1st profession.

01/07/1994 He goes to London until Christmas 1994 for language course.

25/08/95 appointment to Agang Rial

¹⁰⁴ Fr. Renato Kizito Sesana: SS. 1995-1996

07/05/1994 Proposal of Fr. Chemello to Fr. Kizito to work in S.Sudan Nuba or Upper Nile

05/01/1995 Fr. Chemello Request to Gen. Council of Fr. Kizito for S. Sudan

22/04/1995 Fr Kizito asks one year outside community to Fr Fernando Colombo to work with Mgr. Mazzolari.

01/07/1995 Fr. Glenday appoints him to SS.Delegation for Rumbek Diocese. SS.Delegation confirms the request on 20/7/95.

Ukello Yala Joseph,¹⁰⁶ Adot Oryem Albino,¹⁰⁷ Fr.
Magalasi Peter.¹⁰⁸

*Fr. Ayon Hector Oyiamute was for experience out of
community
attached to the diocese of Torit from 1992 to 1996.*

ON BASIC FORMATION

Scholastics on temporary vows:

- Okot Ochermoi Louis Tony (Nairobi)
- Milla Aventore Jimmy (Rome)
- Mawa Bosco Anthony (Peru)
- Lako Martin (Elstree Scholasticate).

Noviciate of Namugongo:

Francis Okeny, Joseph Taban, Paul Idra,

**END OF YEAR 1995 - TOTAL NUMBER of confreres in
the SS.Delegation working in/for the “Liberated Areas” of
Sudan: 19 confreres (with Mgr. C. Mazzolari): (14 Priests
and 5 Brothers).**

**1995 - PERSONNEL: see complete figures at the
end of year 1998**

¹⁰⁵ **Province of Khartoum from 1995.** Born on 31.7.43, Juba, dioc. Juba (SD). T. 9.9.70 - P. 27.9.76 - O. 3.4.71. Firenze 68-70; Roma 70-71; **SS 72-80; NAP 80-84; SS 84-95; KH 95-97; NAP 97-**

¹⁰⁶ **Province of South Africa from 1995.** Born on 1.1.45, Lafon, dioc. Juba (SD). T. 9.9.69 - P. 6.3.74 - O. 23.4.72. Firenze 67-69; Verona 69-70; Roma 70-72; **SS 72-83; I 83-86; SS 86-94; RSA 95-04; SS 04-**

¹⁰⁷ **Province of South Africa from 1994.** Born on 23.11.58, Pajok, dioc. Torit (SD). T. 5.5.84 - P. 25.4.87 - O. 13.12.87. Tartar 82-84; Kampala 84-87; **SS 87-94; RSA 94-06; SS 06-**

¹⁰⁸ **Province of Congo from 1991.** Born on. 31.12.1929, Tombura, dioc. Tombura-Yambio (SD). T. 9.9.56 - P. 9.9.59 - O. 7.7.57 Firenze 54-56; Venegono 56-57; **SS 57-65; U 65-70; EE 71-73; SS 73-88; I 88-91; CN 91-09; U 09-13; SS 14-**

THE GOLDEN JUBILEE OF PRIESTHOOD IN SUDAN

Year 1995 saw another great event for the Catholic Church in Sudan: it was the Golden Jubilee of the Priesthood. The SCBC Mini Conference¹⁰⁹ decided that it would be celebrated together by the three dioceses in the liberated areas in Chukudum on the 25th of November 1995¹¹⁰, feast of Christ the King. At the celebration were present Fr. Jerome Didai Siri, from T/Yambio Diocese, celebrating his “golden jubilee” and Fr. Hector Ayon who was celebrating his “silver jubilee”. The Delegate was present with Bro. Hans D. Ritterbecks.

VISIT OF FRs. GIUSEPPE FILIPPI and MANUEL CASILLAS (General Councillors)

Year 1995 was concluded with the visit of the two General Councillors, Fr. G. Filippi and M. Casillas. All the missions inside South Sudan were reached either by plane or by car, except Kocoa in north Uganda, already visited by the General Superior in January in 1994. The Councillors could see by themselves that the link among communities was possible and that the security was good. This was a very important event along the journey of the South Sudan Delegation at a very crucial point of its history.

¹⁰⁹ SCBC Mini Conference: “*During the SCBC Plenary Assembly (The Sudanese Bishops were there for the AMECEA Conference) in Limbe, Malawi, August 23rd – September 4th 1995, the SCBC Mini Conference was structured to be able to better respond to its internal needs, and to liaise the two groupings of the Conference in a more effective and regular way.*”
“*The SCBC Mini Conference encompasses the three dioceses of Torit, Tombura/Yambio, Rumbek, partially Yei and El Obeid Diocese in regard to the “Nuba Mountains”.*”

¹¹⁰ The SCBC Mini Conference decided that “***The Golden Jubilee of Priesthood will be celebrated together by the 3 dioceses in Chukudum on the 25th of November 1995, feast of Christ the King***”

The Councillors could evaluate all the work done, the security situation and how much South Sudan was in need of evangelisation and human promotion everywhere. At community level they could assess that, even though the reality was difficult and surely of “**front line**”, a planned programme of community life and evangelisation was possible and young personnel, open to this degree of challenges, could get inserted without excessive threat.

Looking at the way younger personnel was appointed from now on, one can truly say that the attention put during the time of the “New Sudan Group” and in the first year of life of the Delegation, convinced the whole General Council that the time was ripe to appoint confreres Priests and Brothers coming directly from the Scholasticates and the Brother Centre of Nairobi.

The welcome given to the Scholastics and Brothers in formation by the confreres of the Delegation for their “summer experience” was a great help to reassure those young confreres that the Missionary ministry in South Sudan was possible. Several of them, after the experience, applied to be appointed to the Delegation. War in South Sudan continued, but the Missionary presence, from now on, was very stable and increasing.

Year 1996

January 1996 started with the third Plenary Delegation Assembly in NAIROBI, Langata, January 07-13/1996, The two General Councillors Fr. Giuseppe Filippi and Manuel Casillas were supposed to be present after the visit to the communities. Unfortunately, the mother of Fr. Filippi died at that time and he could not be present. Fr. M. Casillas remained at the meeting and shared the view, the evaluation

and the encouragement of both of them and of the General Council. He introduced also the topic of another big event: “the beatification of our founder, Daniel Comboni”. Thus, 1996 was a year of “special blessings” from God.

1996: THE BEATIFICATION OF DANIEL COMBONI

An event full of meaning for all the Comboni Congregations, for the world and especially for the Church in Africa and, in a particular way, for the Catholic Church in the Sudan, of which Daniel Comboni was the real founder and first Bishop. The date was the 17th of March and all the Dioceses of Sudan, North and South, together with the Khartoum Province and the South Sudan Delegation, were very busy preparing for the great event. Representatives from every diocese were chosen and, once solved the big difficulty of the immigration permits, everything went with great joy and satisfaction. The Delegate was present in Rome, as well.

Celebrations were organized all over the world where the Comboni Missionaries were present but, as for Sudan and South Sudan, the celebrations had a real special meaning. For the “Liberated Areas” the place chosen by the SCBC Mini Conference was NZARA. The Diocese of T/Yambio, together with the Comboni Missionaries and Comboni Missionary Sisters of Nzara Communities were the organizers “in loco”. The celebration of NZARA was scheduled for the 20th of October 1996, with the participation of Fr David Glenday, the Superior General. Bro. Guillermo Casas (General Councillor) and Sr. Libanos Ayele CMS (General Councillor), were also present. The Delegate of the South Sudan Delegation and the Provincial of the Comboni Sisters in South Sudan were there, as well.

The Local Church was represented by Mgr. Joseph Gasi, Bishop T/Yambio, Mgr. Max Maccram (El Obeid Diocese/Nuba) and Mgr. Cesare Mazzolari of Rumbek Diocese plus other guests from Torit Diocese. In various occasions it was pointed out that, though Comboni is the direct founder of the two missionary institutes, the “Comboni Missionaries” and the “Comboni Missionary Sisters”, in reality, the true “Sons and Daughters” of Comboni are the people of the Local Church of Sudan: Blessed Daniel Comboni is their true founder and father.

Nonetheless, the two institutes of the “Comboni Missionaries” and of the “Comboni Missionary Sisters”, were the instruments through whom the Gospel of Jesus was transmitted and they worked hard so that it may take roots and grow among the Sudanese children of Comboni. For this reason there was a very meaningful ritual celebrating the **“Handing over of the Gospel”** from the General Superior, Fr. David Glenday, representing all the dreams of Comboni for Africa, to Bishop Joseph Gasi Abangite, representing the “beloved children of Comboni”, for whom he gave his life, that is the very “Sudanese Local Church”.

In answer, Bishop Joseph Gasi, gave the General Superior a traditional gift of a pair of “short Zande trousers” made up from the bark of a special tree, together with other traditional objects symbolizing the culture of the people who received the Gospel, people who welcomed Jesus and started following him, taking up the challenge of enculturating his message in their lives.¹¹¹ It was a beautiful sign of the interaction of gifts

¹¹¹ Regarding those “short Zande trousers”, some people present really wished that the General Superior would wear them to experience personally the *“struggle for enculturation”*. In fact, those traditional trousers made out of the bark of a special tree were rather stiff and to get soft it would require a long time of use and a lot of scratches and itches in the contact with the

between evangelizers and evangelized people, and the gift of Bishop J. Gasi a reminder that every culture has something useful, meaningful and important to offer.

OTHER EVENTS

THE TOPOSA AREA: Bishop Paride asked again to take care of Isoke Parish but, considering the high number of Catholic People there, it was perceived as a better solution if a Diocesan Priest will be there. Considering the big number of non-evangelised people among the Toposa, in January 1996 it was decided to get the Toposa Area as a priority for our evangelisation in Torit Diocese, with Narus (July 1996) as a link with a possible second commitment among the Toposa People. Fr. Elia Ciapetti was put as the superior of the community (21/07/1997).

LEER COMMITMENT: in January 1996 Fr. Antonio La Braca was sent to Nairobi not yet assigned to the South Sudan Delegation.¹¹² and, after the encounter with the Delegate, Fr. F. Chemello, he accepted to work among the Nuer People,¹¹³ as previously requested by Bishop Paride Taban.¹¹⁴ Fr. A. La

body's skin. The writer adds: *"Maybe Bishop Joseph Gasi really meant to make him taste what 'this challenge between evangelizers and evangelized people meant' along the years..."*, something which, actually, can be true for both sides.

¹¹² **28/01/1996 Fr. D. Glenday appoints Fr. A. La Braca to SS.**

Delegation starting from 01/07/1996 (Fr. Antonio was already in Jacaranda since January 96)

¹¹³ **24/01/1996:** Appointment of Fr. Antonio La Braca as "Local Superior" of the Comboni community of LEER, *responsible of the Leer project.*

¹¹⁴ **09/02/1996 Fr. F. Chemello to Bishop Taban Paride** responsible for the "Upper Nile Project" Diocese of Malakal: *"In answer to your expectations, expressed in your letter of the 03/07/1995, to have Comboni Personnel involved in the Malakal area, Bro Ritterbecks Hans Dieter was appointed on 14/10/1995. Now with the positive acceptance of Fr. Antonio*

Braca proposed to visit Leer in February¹¹⁵ with Bro. Hans D. Ritterbecks and Sr. Giovannina Zucca,¹¹⁶ in order to have an open dialogue with the catechists and leaders on the reasons for which they were requesting Comboni Personnel and to write down a letter which would witness the essential points of the missionary commitment and relationship with the Christian Communities in the Nuer land.

Once in Leer, the missionaries spent the whole week visiting the Christian Communities around, such was the eagerness of the population to see them. They had a very tiring time, but it was good for them because they could see, with their own eyes, the geographical environment of Leer and the level of the Nuer Christian communities there.¹¹⁷

After the meeting and the agreement,¹¹⁸ they went back to Nairobi and started preparing everything needed to return to Leer. In March, Fr. A. La Braca and Bro. Hans. D. Ritterbecks, went to Lokichokio and, having sent from there a radio message to the Catechists of Leer, they took their flight

La Braca and the favourable opinion of the Delegation, I appoint him for the same project and with the starting base in LEER, as agreed with you."

¹¹⁵ **03/02/1996 Minutes of the meeting with Bishop Paride Taban.**

Present: Fr. Francesco Chemello, Bro. Hans Dieter Ritterbecks, Fr. Antonio La Braca. Methodology and approaches. It was also agreed to visit Leer for one week, at first, and then go back to Nairobi to prepare what was needed to return to Leer. It was also agreed that the "*Malakal Project Personnel*" be present at the Diocesan Assembly of Torit Diocese in Narus.

¹¹⁶ **13/02/1996 Meeting of Narus.** Present Sr. Giovannina Zucca, Bro. Hans D. Ritterbecks, Fr. A. La Braca.: the "Style of life and organization" was discussed and the visit to Leer for one week confirmed.

¹¹⁷ Wherever they went they were received with "an unexpected and undeserved welcome", both from the Christian communities and the Authorities.

¹¹⁸ The missionaries clarified to the Christian community their style of life and organization and the Christian community, in their "thirst" for the Word of God, fully agreed upon it.

and reached Leer. Unfortunately, just a few catechists were there welcoming them because the radio message of their coming did not reach them and the population was unaware of it.

Fr. A. La Braca sent report to Bishop Paride to inform Him about their arrival in Leer and about the official start.¹¹⁹ The official date of the starting of the “Nuer Mission” in Leer was, thus, fixed on March the 12th 1996. In answer to the letter of the Delegate, on that occasion, the Head Catechist “**Daniel Kai Liah**” wrote a letter of thanks to Fr. Francesco Chemello for the arrival of the Comboni Missionaries.¹²⁰

The letter is very meaningful and is a positive confirmation of the fulfilled desire of the Nuer People to have the Combonis present in their midst and a thanksgiving to God who, finally, answered to their prayers.

Bro. Raniero Iacomella, who had been appointed to the SS.Delegation since the 1st of July 1996, was appointed to

¹¹⁹ **LEER 21/02/1996** First meeting with Catechists: minutes.

- **Report to Bishop Paride on our staying in Leer** – Dioc. of Malakal.
From Fr. A. La Braca: **On 12 March 1996** (to Leer) by plane: *“Only few catechists were there to welcome us. Our radio message sent from Lokichokio had not reached them. Catechists brought us home on their shoulders. The compound was as we had left it and not as we had agreed upon the previous month.....”* Thus, **The 12th of March 1996** is the official date of starting of the presence in LEER and amongst the NUER PEOPLE of South Sudan.

¹²⁰ **20/02/1996 LEER - From H/Catechist Daniel Kai Liah to the Delegate, Fr. Francesco Chemello:** *“We have already received your letter on 20/02/1996, the Christian community of Leer and Upper Nile as whole (have)very well appreciated what you have done for them, we really give you our thanks (and)to almighty God who answered our great desire. And also to Fr. Francesco, because you represented our needs to your people (the) Comboni Missionaries. ...We really appreciate and welcome the visit you promised before the month of May. May God will lead you in peace. Daniel Kai Liah H/Catechist of Catholic Christian Community LEER.”*

Leer starting from the 1st of September 1996 and got immediately into his ministry there. Fr. Fernando Galarza, appointed to the SS. Delegation from the 1st of July 1996 reached Leer in 1997. In 1998 Fr. Roy Carlos Zuñiga could join them as well.

LIMA (PERU) MEETING: worth to be mentioned is the Lima (Peru) meeting of the Provincials and Delegates in June. This offered the SS. Delegate the chance of visiting the Sudanese Scholastics in Lima. Back to Kenya he organized the visit also of the Novices in Namugongo (Uganda).

MAPUORDIT TROUBLE and CAPTIVITY: from the 17th to the 29th of August. This was a very unfortunate problem which happened in Mapuordit mission and that affected badly the whole Comboni Community of Mapuordit, Fr. Michael Barton and Bro. Raniero Iacomella, Fr. Raphael Riel (diocesan), the DOLSH (the Daughters of Our Lady of Sacred Heart) and the whole Christian Community. The misunderstanding with the Local SPLA commander brought the situation to a very critical point. The matter went on for 13 days but, at last, it reached a positive conclusion and, thanks to God, did not have a negative effect in the future of Mapuordit mission.

VISIT OF THE PRO-NUNTIO: November 1996. The visit of the Pro-Nunzio to the Sudan his Grace Archbishop Joseph E. Ender to the “Liberated Areas” in November 1996 was really very meaningful. Bishop Paride Taban was accompanying him and also Fr. F. Chemello was present when he visited Narus. People received him with great joy and enthusiasm as if Pope John Paul II were present among them.

NUBA MOUNTAINS: In November the Delegate went together with Bishop Max Macram to visit the people of the Nuba Mountain and explore the possibility of having a commitment also there, possibly in Kauda, but this desire could never materialize.

CONGO: By the end of the year also the situation in Congo became very bad and on the 30th of December the confreres from Duru and the Sisters of Duru/Dungu had to flee. They were welcomed in Nzara.

BILATERAL AGREEMENTS WITH BISHOPS: Worth mentioning is also the starting of the formal Bilateral Agreements with the Bishops of the “Liberated Areas”. The topic was tackled with difficulty on the side of the Bishops, since they were not used (except partially for Torit Diocese) to think that they had the responsibility of “supporting” the missionaries working in their dioceses. It took time but, little by little, it was accepted. However, its practical implementation took place with the new SS. Delegate in 1999.

1996 A YEAR OF ASSIGNMENTS: it was a year with a good number of assignments, also of young confreres, to the South Sudan Delegation. The issue of the security in South Sudan was fairly good, the various commitments got consolidated and, even though Khartoum was bombing centres here and there, our locations were not disturbed. The future of the “South Sudan Mission” started looking much brighter. The General Council was strengthening its confidence in the Comboni presence in the “Liberated Areas”.

1996 - PERSONNEL: see complete figures at the end of year 1998

END OF YEAR 1996 - TOTAL NUMBER of confreres in the SS.Delegation working in/for the “Liberated Areas” of Sudan were 28 (with Mgr. C. Mazzolari): (21 Priests and 7 Brothers).

YEAR 1997

January 1997 started with the fourth Plenary Delegation Assembly in NAIROBI from January the 12th to the 21st. The facilitator was Fr. Renzo Salvano mccj. The venue was the Carmelite Fathers of Langata. The main topic was a workshop on ‘Lumko Programme at the light of the African Synod’ It was preceded by the Spiritual Retreat (Jan. 5-11) directed by Fr. Francesco Pierli mccj. During the assembly, on Saturday 18th at 10.00, there was the ordination to the Diaconate of the South Sudanese Scholastic **Louis Okot** in Kariobangi.

EVENTS

In the SS. Delegation

1. Preparation of the Great Jubilee of Year 2000 (Year of Jesus Christ 1997 and of the Holy Spirit 1998. Pentecost: “The Holy Spirit Protagonist of Evangelisation.”
2. **Gonzalez Armando Ramos Bro.** Appointed to SS.Delegation 01/07/1997 (To Narus)
3. First professions of Bro. Francis Okeny, Bro. Joseph Taban, Sc. Paul Idra, Namugongo, 10/05/1997.
4. Perpetual profession of Fr. Michele Stragapede in Namugongo 10/05/1997, with the other Novices/Scholastics. (He chose this occasion as well).
5. Perpetual profession of and diaconate of Scholastic Bosco Mawa Anthony and his ordination to Priesthood.

6. Priesthood Ordination of Fr. Louis Okot at Iboni (Lopit) Sudan on 25/05/1997; Fr. Aventore Milla in Robidire Refugee Centre (Adjumani) Northern Uganda. Fr. Samuel Juma (Khartoum Prov.). Nzara community helped a lot.
7. Death of Scholastic Duku Victor, Nairobi/KE, 24.7.1997.
8. The Postulancy of the SS. Delegation: where? Together with which Province?
9. July 1997 Leer – 3 Comboni Sisters joined Leer: Sr. Giovannina Zucca, Sr. Maddalena Virgis and Sr. Lorena Morales.
10. Fr. Joseph Ukello, working in the Province of South Africa since 1995, celebrates his silver jubilee of ordination in Narus in 1997 (Ordained on 23.4.72).
11. **Fr. Louis Okot** appointed to Peru from 01/07/1997 – **Fr. Milla Aventore Jimmy** appointed to Malawi/Zambia, **Fr. Bosco Mawa Anthony** appointed to Uganda.

AT LEVEL OF MCCJ INSTITUTE

The big event of the 15th General Chapter Sept 1997 “***A Fresh Start from Mission***”

JOYS AND SADNESS: Year 1997 was particularly good for the joyful and meaningful events which took place among the students radical members of the Delegation, Novices, Brothers and Scholastics. There was the great joy of having first and final religious professions, new ordinations to the Diaconate and to the Priesthood in the refugee camps of Pakele/Adjumani and within South Sudan (Iboni). Unfortunately we had also the very sad event of the death of the scholastic Duku Victor in Nairobi, but the brotherly care

with which he was accompanied¹²¹ to the final encounter with Jesus, the risen Lord who called him, left everybody, included his parents, with a lot of consolation.

THE DELEGATION POSTULANCY: Vocation promotion was carried on particularly with Bro. Mario Rossignoli who was helping in the logistics at St. Mary Seminary in Kococa. He was taking care of youth in the refugee camps of Pakele/Adjumani and holding regular meeting with them. The question raised was: “where will they go for the Postulancy?” The SS. Delegation had no strength to start its own postulancy, so it was clear that they should be linked either to the postulancy of Uganda or the one of Kenya, at least for some years.

Since the Students were mainly from the refugee camps in Uganda, the Delegate tried to contact the vocation director, Fr. Luciano Fulvi, the formators of the Postulancy and the provincial. While the enquiry was on the way it became clear that there were several difficulties for the Sudanese students to be accepted: the Uganda postulancy had almost no place free, the level of study - A level - and high average, the different accompaniment in the vocation promotion, etc. The matter was followed up by the Delegate and put on the agenda to be discussed in the Plenary Assembly of January 1998. The suggestion was to contact the Kenya province, as well, given the fact that they were accepting students with “O Level”.

¹²¹ Scholastic Victor Duku, on his last year of scholasticate, died in Jacaranda House, Nairobi on the 24th of July 1997. He was admitted to Nairobi Hospital but then the care in the final months was given in the Delegation house. In this regard, the one who, with real love, care and competence, looked after Victor was Bro. Raniero Iacomella, together with a lady nurse from Nairobi. All the Jacaranda community were united in accompanying him.

THE 15th GENERAL CHAPTER - September 1997 “A Fresh Start from Mission”

It was the first Chapter in the life of the SS.Delegation, the previous Chapter, the 14th, took place a year after the “NEW SUDAN GROUP” started in 1991. That time saw the confirmation of the group within the South Sudan Province and the attempt of the group to move its first steps towards the future during the hard time of the pick point of the war. Now a good journey was done and the SS. Delegation had the chance to share the meaning of a “frontier evangelisation” very difficult and challenging, but also very appealing to the new generation of Combonis.

“A FRESH START FROM MISSION”

The topic of the Chapter was very much inspiring in the historical situation the SS. Delegation was living. The fact of having a good number of young confreres, made the reflection on mission a top priority: all this called for a renewed missionary methodology which stressed a lot the **“insertion factor”** and the full sharing with people and their situation of life in the proclamation and witness of the Gospel.

The situation of a South Sudan with long experience of war, collapse of civil, and education infrastructures, the issues of religious continuity and growth, Local church in relation to Evangelisers, had to find new ways of collaboration, of looking towards the future, counting especially on the goodwill and full involvement of people. **“A mission from within”** more than an **“imported one”**. This would require simpler means and longer time of implementation by **“walking with the speed of the people”**. It would be based on stronger foundations, which is the faith and the personal

commitment of people themselves. *“Let them be the real protagonists”*, was the common motto.

“Empowerment of people” at every level: social, economic, educational and religious. If the motto was very clear, the implementation was not certainly very easy. This effort in the historical situation of South Sudan regarding all the above mentioned fields, in many cases, seemed the effort of one who wants to drag a heavy elephant who was stuck in the mud for so many years of vicissitudes, emergencies, war, divisions, dependency and a “North Arab policy” which kept purposely the South “underdeveloped” in all the sectors of life.

In the middle of all this, the Catholic Church, and the other churches, were always the reference point for the people. In the middle of a non-existing government, the Catholic Church, and the other Churches, were covering all the issues affecting the people, from the direct involvement in all kind of helps, until the international advocacy. UN/OLS (Operation Lifeline Sudan) and numerous NGOs were covering most of the areas related to food distribution, transport, health and education. The churches were also involved in covering these fields.

EVANGELISATION

In the middle of so many challenges and needs, the big questions were: “What kind of priorities should we Comboni Missionaries take up in order not to fall into the trap of becoming an NGO-style of missionaries?”, “What is ‘the specific’ of an evangeliser?”, “What type of Church? NGO-style?”, “How can the Church contribute so that the government and the civil authorities be more aware of their responsibility in Society?”, “Which type of collaboration with

the Governing bodies? How to face the new challenges in evangelisation?

Year 1997 was a year which experienced the growth in number of young personnel starting taking up practically the challenges of evangelisation in the “Liberated Areas” and tried to reflect and question old methodologies with the desire of finding out new ones, more fit for the situation and sensitivity, especially that of **“the poor means”** in evangelisation

1997 - PERSONNEL: see complete figures at the end of year 1998

END OF YEAR 1997 - TOTAL NUMBER of confreres in the SS.Delegation working in/for the “Liberated Areas” of Sudan are now 30 (with Mgr. C. Mazzolari): (22 Priests and 8 Brothers).

YEAR 1998

Year 1998 started with the 5th Plenary Assembly of the South Sudan Delegation in Nairobi on the main theme of the 1997 16th General Chapter, **“To start afresh from mission”**. It was preceded by the delegation retreat guided by Fr. Thomas Leyden (SVD) at the Dimesse Sisters of Karen from the 5th to the 12th of January.

As agreed by the great majority of the confreres, the plenary assembly took place at Jacaranda Avenue Delegation House from January the 14th to the 21st. A lot of adaptation was needed because of lack of proper space and facilities, but confreres thought it would be more in line and in solidarity with the situation of “our suffering people”.

Due to the importance of implementing the 16th General Chapter and the particular historical situation of our Delegation considered to be working in ***“a front line evangelisation”***, Fr. Nunez Gonzalez J. A. and Bro. Umberto Martinuzzo, general councillors, were sent to be present at the assembly. The facilitator was Fr. Guido Oliana mccj from the Uganda Province and one of the chapter members.

As mentioned before, a **“Fresh start from mission”** was what was needed in our Delegation that now had acquired a consistent number of young confreres. Community life and spirituality, community style, finances and projects, mission methodology, human promotion in emergency situations, type of relationship with the “Local Church”, places of presence, issues of human rights, of justice, of poor means, etc. The presence in the Nuer land and its mission style was also having a big impact in the younger confreres.

COMMITMENTS

Regarding the already existing commitments and the possible suggested new ones, there was a reflection going on the various places and on the different issues:

Torit Diocese:

- Beside **Narus**, a second community in the Toposa area was proposed and exploration and talks with Bishop Paride were under way. A new requested commitment in the Lotuko / Buoya areas was excluded. **Kocoa** refugees was to be kept.

Rumbek Diocese:

- The three commitments already existing, **Mapuordit**, **Agang Rial** and **Marial Lou**, were sufficient and

needed consolidation and possible expansion in the pastoral, educational and other social fields.

Tombura/Yambio Diocese:

- **Nzara:** the PALICA centre was already handed over to the diocese with the departure of Fr. J.L.Martinez, but also the parish was under discussion. The proposal was to hand it over to the diocese and another parish, more in need of a missionary presence, taken over by the MCCJ. The issue was under discernment with Bishop J. Gasi.

Malakal Diocese (still under the care of the Bishop of Torit):

- Leer was going on well and the members of the community were busy with improving the Nuer language skill and expanding the pastoral care through land visits on foot. Bro. Hans was fully committed to pastoral work while Bro. Raniero was committed in agriculture and in helping people on the same field and in the running of the mission.
- Fr. A. La Braca was given a wide responsibility by Bishop Paride Taban as his “Vicar” in the Nuer land ***“Diocesan administrator for all the Nuer”*** and had an extensive plan of visits all over the areas of the “Western Nuer”.
- Regarding the Central and Eastern Nuer, no commitment was taken by the SS.Delegation but, since Fr. A. La Braca received requests from catechists of the “Central” and “Eastern Nuer”, from Leer, on Easter time April 8th 1998, he made a journey of “exploration” in the “Eastern Upper Nile”

area to Juaibor, Fangak, Dhoreak, Ayod, Waat, Lamkien and Akobo in order to assess the situation.¹²²

- Fr. A. La Braca had in mind to propose to the SS. Delegation to take up one commitment in the area of the “Central Nuer”, suggesting JUAIBOR for the immediate start, while the real place would have been chosen at proper time, after specific knowledge of the whole area.

Yei Diocese:

- Fr. Mario Busellato, who always worked with the Kuku refugee people in Adjumani from Moyo MCCJ Community, since the time he had to flee from Kajokaji, was insisting that the Delegation should take up the commitment within Yei diocese which was never revoked either by the General Council or by the Diocese. Bishop Erkolano Ladu was not staying in Yei but in Juba and the town was under government control. The Delegate took up the issue when Yei was captured by SPLA and the Bishop could reside there and, after agreement with the bishop, he put into his agenda a visit to the area of Kajokaji, which he did.

¹²² (Account of Fr. Antonio La Braca - Old Fangak mccj Community) “*In 1994 (January) bishop Vincent Mojwok gave catechist **Michael Thilyang** faculty to baptize people in all the Ghezira area. In 1996 he gave the faculty also to catechist **Yohannes Toang** and this created a little problem of leadership among the two.*” “*On Easter time 1998, Fr. Antonio went to Juaibor and from Juaibor to Fangak, to Dhoreak and, with some catechists of Fangak, he proceeded to Ayod, Waat, Lamkien and Akobo. He planned to reach Maiwut, but the authorities stopped him for security reasons. So, he walked back to Lamkien and was taken to Leer by plane.*”

MCCJ Vocation Promotion:

- With the closing of the “Province of South Sudan” at the end of December 1994, also the vocation promotion, as it was carried out in the province, stopped. The South Sudan Delegation which started in January 1995 had nothing set in place for it. The students in the formation houses were those previously followed up, and so were those who were ordained in 1997.
- Khartoum Province would have taken care of the students in the government areas, but in the “liberated areas” and in the refugee camps the work had to be started from the scratch. The task of following the youth who were interested to know more about the Comboni Missionaries was given to the community of Kocoa, with Bro. Mario Rossignoli as a reference person, and the Delegate for the youth refugees in Kenya.
- Year 1998 had three or four students in the final year of secondary (“O” level) school, so it was urgent to finalize the matter of the Postulancy. This was put on the agenda of the assembly of 1999. Meanwhile, the Delegate went on with the talk with the Ugandan and Kenyan provinces.

On Basic Formation, on temporary vows:

- Bro. Francis Okeny, Bro. Joseph Taban,
(Brother Centre-Nairobi)

- Sc. Lako Martin. (Elstree Scholsticate), Paul
Idra, (Nairobi Scholasticate).

FINANCES:

One of the topics very much related to the question of:
“which style of evangelisation was most proper in South Sudan during this time?” was FINANCES.

Truly, the type of financial system/style would surely affect, either in positive or in negative, evangelisation itself. Confreres with long experience in Sudan were used to handle finances, projects, international assistance (eg. through containers) and relationship with the dioceses in a way that, so to say, who has got money, would use it according his own mind quite freely. In order to avoid this approach, already since the start of the “New Sudan Group” in 1990, some guideline were clearly laid down in order to avoid paternalism, dependency, ostentation of means and power, private decision administrating and allocating funds to people and institutions.¹²³

This was not to discourage confreres in their personal initiative and generosity, but in order to use properly finances at the service of mission, and in New Sudan this “mission” had particular implications. The “New Sudan Group”, and later on the “South Sudan Delegation,” was serving the mission in a situation of war, of emergency and of situations of disaster. Confreres were living and working together, side by side, with other diocesan pastoral agents like priests, catechists and lay people. The need of “solidarity”, communion and avoidance of privileges was “a must” in evangelisation and in tackling urgent needs arising.

¹²³ Directives of Fr. Milani: 1990

The experience of being all in a “common pot” was of great help in overcoming the difficulties of a war situation and of lack of material things, facilities (means of transportation and houses) and other commodities. This had the positive result of helping everybody, and especially the Comboni Missionaries as a group, to embrace a new approach, different than the one the Local Church (especially bishops and priests) were contesting: ***“the financial power of the Comboni Missionaries”*** connected, of course, with the religious and executive (managerial and decision-making) power hindering the authority of the local Church Leaders.

These initial guidelines, developed little by little and more and more the direction of the finances towards the system of a more integrated “Common Fund”¹²⁴ which basic principle was to acquire a deeper communitarian approach to “Mission”, starting from the community planning of the pastoral activities, to the community needs until the pastoral and social project involved, always keeping into perspective the real

¹²⁴ In this regard it is good to mention that the Coordinator and the Delegate was coming from a 10 years Malawi/Zambia experience of *“Total Common Fund”*. He had already gone through many long discussions in M/Z with confreres coming from a non-total common fund experiences and was now finding himself in the very middle of “the opposite legacy” which was not just matter of “finances” but of the whole approach to “mission”. So it was the ***“mission methodology”*** he was more concerned of, than the mere “throwing together of all money”. In the more “free system” the Delegate never doubted that confreres would not use their helps and funds (small or big) with generosity for other people and mission purposes (although some were indeed using dubious financial methods) and projects, but he did have very strong doubts about that system which brought Comboni Missionaries and Local Church into very tough relationship, mistrust and criticism which in one word can be termed as “power struggle”. It seemed there was little perception that “the times had changed” and that “we Combonis” needed to change with them. This was what was implied in the new trend: “the struggle for a changing of attitude”, that is “how to be more at service” and “part of the Local Church” without giving up “our specific”, “our deep identity as MCCJ”.

needs of the various entities in a concrete spot (MCCJ community, Church needs, Social needs). Finances had to be at real service of all of this and “not pressurizing or imposing” plans beyond necessity or feasibility just because funds were available. Above all, the avoidance of “merely personal projects”.

Of course, in the middle of this struggle, it did not mean that the “Local Church” had not to walk also its own journey. It was also the right time for the “self-awareness” of its own responsibilities in whatever was concerning the pastoral, educational and social activities and also in regards to the help for sustenance of its “church personnel”, wherever it may come from. In this regards the starting of laying down of “Bilateral Agreements” between Bishops and MCCJ, on the bases of the Vatican document “*Mutuae Relationes*”¹²⁵ set up for this purpose, were a very meaningful step to stimulate the reciprocal rights and duties and the limiting of reciprocal undue interference.

In conclusion, the matter of finances and financial system was not “just financial” but, indeed, it was deeply touching the meaning and the way Comboni Missionaries would tackle the whole methodology of Mission, the spirituality, the pastoral planning, the priorities and the type of sensitivity and understanding of being one Delegation “sharing in the different evangelising undertaking with one heart and one mind.”

¹²⁵ Sacred Congregation For Religious And For Secular Institutes, Sacred Congregation For Bishops, *Directives For The Mutual Relations Between Bishops And Religious In The Church*: **Chapter VII**

This is the reason why the Delegate was always committed, not only to have a shift from the “former system” to a more “communitarian one” envisaged in the “Total Common fund”, but to understand and “live mission”, as much as possible, as a “common venture”, “a cenacle of Apostles”. The agreement on this line was not reached during his term of office, but with the new Delegate after the Plenary Assembly of January 1999.

SS. DELEGATE TO ITALY

The Delegate went to visit Kocoo community and felt sick with a lot of pain at the abdomen. On his return to Nairobi on 23/05/1998 he went for a medical check-up and was found out with stones in the gall bladder and in need to be operated. The doctor suggested to go to Italy for such an operation, and so he did. On 30/06/1998 he was admitted in the hospital of Borgo Trento (VR), operated and dismissed on 08/07/1998. He recovered well and, slowly-slowly could resume his activity.

On his going back he had to check with the “Ordinaries” at which stage the topics discussed before his departure on sick leave were and to present them to the Delegation Council for final approval before the expiring of the “term of office” of the Delegation Council and the handing over to the new administration.

Torit Diocese: the visit with Bishop Paride for a second location had gone until “Fort Loweli”, he had proposed a place on that area, but the diocese needed still to think how to implement it, so the decision on a second commitment in the Toposa area beside **Narus**, had to be postponed and passed on to the new administration, but a young confrere, **Fr. Mitiku Habte Cheksa** was appointed on 31/10/1998. **Kocoo** refugees, instead, would go on normally.

Rumbek Diocese: the three existing commitments of **Mapuordit, Agang Rial** and **Marial Lou**, would go on and consolidate with the addition of new personnel, Fr. J.L.Martinez, Bro. M. Zonta and Fr. Hector Ayon. In 1998, however, Marial Lou Mission lived a very tough experience of a serious famine made worse by many displaced Dinka people who fled from Wau. The town was attacked by CDR. Kerubino Kwanyin Bol,¹²⁶ and many people arrived in that area without anything.

The two communities of MCCJ and CMS were deeply concerned and worked very hard to face the situation with food distribution, especially coming from World Vision, and health care. Many people died. Even Fr. Mattia Bizzarro underwent a very serious infection after he drank water from an infected river, without realizing that there were decomposing bodies of people thrown into the water.

For Tombura/Yambio Diocese: the things became more complicated: the arrangement of a new missionary presence in another location of the diocese, which was almost finalized before the Delegate went on sick leave, was changed. Although Bishop J. Gasi was told that it was urgent to take that decision he carried on delaying thinking there was no problem. Moreover a complication on the relationship between the OLS. (Operation Lifeline Sudan) and the Governor Mr. Abujon brought un-necessarily the security level at “exit point”.

¹²⁶ From 1987-92, Kerubino was held in a series of SPLA detention centers, in prolonged arbitrary incommunicado detention for alleged coup plotting. He escaped and joined Riek Machar's faction and later created his own force in Gogrial, a garrison town in Bahr El Ghazal. Since 1994 he also allied with the government of Sudan. See Human Rights Watch, *Famine in Sudan*, pp. 14-15.

No alternative flight arrangement, in case of evacuation, was done by the diocese for an “independent” exit in case of real necessity. Thus, two confreres, Fr. Horácio Rossas and Fr. Alberto Eisman went to Nairobi with the last OLS organized flight. Bishop J. Gasi was in Nairobi for a meeting and the Delegate met him and expressed his dismay on how the matter was handled and knew that the final result of all of this would possibly be the handing over of Nzara without any new commitment to be taken up, that would have meant the complete withdrawal of the MCCJ. from T/Yambio Diocese. After meeting the Bishop, the Delegate himself went personally to see the situation in Nzara.

In Nzara, he found Fr. E. Cellana in a very critical health situation while all OLS flights were suspended. Fr. Cellana needed to be evacuated immediately. Fr. Chemello was able to convince him, though reluctant, to leave immediately and went to ask the OLS officials, who came to talk to the Governor, to get him out to Kenya with their flight. At first they refused, but when they saw his severe health condition, they took him out and he could get immediately to Nairobi Hospital for treatment. Fr. Chemello had to go back to Nairobi a week later with a Comboni Sister’s chartered flight. Then, what the Delegate feared, that is the possible total withdrawal from T/Yambio diocese, just happened in the middle of 1999.

Malakal Diocese: (always under the care of the Bishop of Torit):

On the side of Upper Nile (Unity State) in the middle of 1998 the situation had become very bad and insecure because of the

fighting between the army of Gen. Paulino Matiep¹²⁷ and the one of Riek Machar.¹²⁸ **Leer** was really under threat and the

¹²⁷ 23/07/1998 Letter of Fr. A. La Braca to Mr. Paulino Matiep (former governor of W.U.N-Mankien) and Mr. Martin Machot (RASS Secretary Mankien). Fr. Antonio pleads and invites them to bring peace and not distraction to their areas.

¹²⁸ In April 1997 the Sudanese government entered into the Khartoum Peace Agreement with Riek Machar's forces and several other smaller rebel factions. **Riek Machar** was appointed president of the Southern States Coordinating Council (SSCC), to govern the south, and also headed a new army (SSDF) created from the former rebel armies that signed the Khartoum Peace Agreement. **Paulino Matiep** was promoted to major general in the Sudanese army in 1998 and his militia, directly supplied by the government, was given a name: South Sudan Unity Movement/Army (SSUM/A)....

The SSDF complained that it only received equipment from the government of Sudan as long as the government verified that SSDF units were engaged against "the Dinka" (SPLA). As stated by the SSDF's chief of staff: *"Immediately after the Khartoum Peace Agreement was ratified, we received some little help: rifles, ammunition. We only received this when we were fighting. If no fighting, we did not receive anything."*

The alliance dating from 1991 between Paulino Matiep and Riek Machar broke down in armed clashes in September 1997, over the campaign for governorship of Unity State. The government took advantage of the circumstances by continuing to separately fund Paulino Matiep and his militia to keep the Riek Machar group from controlling any oilfields. In addition, as long as the Nuer fought each other, conditions would not be "right" for a referendum on southern autonomy. Many in the UDSF/SSDF suspected that this was another government objective. When his candidate lost the December 1997 gubernatorial election, according to one observer, "Paulino declared war" on Riek Machar's SSDF.

Rather than force Paulino Matiep to accept the results of the "election" and rein him in, the government seized on this rivalry for control of Unity State to stoke the fires of ethnic fighting among the Nuer. Sometime before 1998, the government promoted Paulino Matiep to the rank of major general in the Sudanese government army. Maj. Gen. Paulino Matiep announced the formation of his South Sudan Unity Movement/Army (SSUM/A), based in Mankien, in March 1998. He built up his forces with government resources, including weapons and ammunition, and recruitment (forced and voluntary) of Bul Nuer boys and men from his

members of the community residing in Leer were forced to evacuate to Nairobi, while Fr. A. La Braca was still around visiting people on the side of Nyal, Payinjiar and Ganyiel, after his coming back from the “exploration visit” of the “Central and Eastern Nuer” regions.

Leer was burnt down completely. Later on, Fr. La Braca was asked to go to Nairobi for urgent talk with the General Superior.¹²⁹ When in Nairobi, the matter of the Upper Nile Nuer situation was discussed in length. Bishop Paride Taban and Bishop Vincent Mojwok Nyiker were there for the SCBC meeting and everything could be finalized with the acknowledgement of all the parties. At that time the proposal of another Comboni community in “Eastern Nuer” was presented and finalized.

Status of the two communities:

- **NYAL**, as new residence, instead of Leer which was destroyed. The new location would be with Fr. Galarza Fernando superior and parish priest, Fr.

own area. Paulino Matiep had training centres for new recruits in Nhialdiu and Koch. His troops numbered perhaps as many as 10,000.

The government promoted the myth of the “**ungovernable south**” sure to plunge into anarchy that would end in a “Rwanda” scenario without steady oversight from Khartoum.” Riek Machar appealed in writing to President El Bashir several times in 1998 and 1999 to stop arming Paulino Matiep, who was making war on Machar’s forces. Riek Machar even appealed to international oil company executives to pressure the government to remove Paulino Matiep, whom Riek Machar described as “our problem.” See: “THE ARAKIS PERIOD: 1992-98”

<http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/sudan1103/11.htm>

¹²⁹ 25/08/1998 to COSV Nyal. Fr. F. Chemello to Fr. La Braca, “You are urgently requested to communicate with the General Superior in Roma....I ask you to come out on the 29th of August and proceed immediately to Nairobi. (Radio Message).

Zuniga Roy Carlo (new comer) assistant and Bro. Iacomella Raniero as community bursar.

- **JUAIBOR**, Fr. A. La Braca and Bro. Hans D. Ritterbecks,¹³⁰ with the understanding that the real location will be confirmed after sometime of experience in loco.¹³¹

For both locations the appointments were done in September 1998 and it was the last commitment taken by the out-going Delegation Council.

¹³⁰ **21/09/1998 Fr. Chemello to Fr. A. La Braca and Hans Ritterbecks:** *“New evangelizing care in the East Upper Nile”. “Following the decision of the Delegation Council expressed in the letter to the bishops Paride Taban and Vincent Mojwok (22/09/1998) I confirm the opening of a new commitment in the East Upper Nile / Nuer area.”*

¹³¹ (Account of Fr. A. La Braca – Old Fangak mccj. Community) *“Fr. Antonio and Bro. Hans went to Juaibor (Central Upper Nile) in the area of Fangak. They delivered one month course to all the catechists of Fangak area (Ghezira) and, in the meantime, they had to look for a suitable place where to open another ‘Comboni Community’. At the end of the course in Juaibor Fr. Antonio and all the catechists held a meeting in order to decide the specific mission and job of the two main catechists, Michael Thilyang and Yohannes Toang. It was decided that Michael would go to PHOM, under the direct responsibility of Bishop Mojwok, and Yohannes would remain with Fr. Antonio in the area of Fangak-Ghezira..... Bro. Hans remained in Juaibor and celebrated Christmas there. Fr Antonio went to Kew, Fangak, Paguir and celebrated Christmas in Paguir. It was during this safari that Fr. Antonio liked Fangak and told the population to get ready, because the Combonis would have arrived in January 1999. When he went back to Nairobi, he proposed it to the new Delegation Superior as a new ‘suitable place for a Comboni Community in the East-Upper-Nile’. However, Bro. Hans was appointed elsewhere and Fr. Antonio went back alone.” In 1999 Fr. A. La Braca was appointed ‘permanent parish priest’ of all the Ghezira and ‘Moderator’ of all the Nuer in West-Centre and East Upper Nile with residence in Fangak. As for the catechists, “all the Nuer over there believe that the catechists **James Riek, Michael Thilyang and Moses Gatjang** should be rightly considered ‘the fathers of our faith’ and all the other catechists ‘the pillars of Christian Catholic Evangelisation in Upper Nile’.”*

Yei Diocese: The Delegate went to visit the area of Kajokaji and prepared a report to be discussed at the Plenary Assembly of January 1999.

MCCJ Vocation Promotion / Postulancy: the Delegate prepared a report of his findings in relation to the Ugandan and Kenyan provinces to be presented and discussed at the Plenary Assembly of January 1999. However, he saw very little chance for a relationship with Uganda while he indicated it as “more feasible” with Kenya. The new administration had to finalize.

In Formation were still

- Bro. Francis Okeny, Bro. Joseph Taban,
(Brother Centre-Nairobi)
- Sc. Paul Idra, (Nairobi Scholasticate).

PERSONNEL AT THE END OF YEAR 1998

THE TOTAL NUMBER of confreres in the South Sudan Delegation working in/for the “Liberated Areas” of Sudan at the close of year 1998 was 35 (with Mgr. C. Mazzolari): (26 Priests and 9 Brothers).

PERSONNEL

From January 1st 1995 to December 31st 1998

Before the starting of the South Sudan Delegation with the 1st of January 1995, all the confreres belonging to the “New Sudan Group” appeared under the personnel of the South Sudan Province, although the New Sudan Group had its autonomy and referred directly to the General Council. The students in formation were also under the SS.Province. With the erection of the South Sudan Delegation all the confreres

and the students in formation fell under its jurisdiction. Starting from the 1st of January 1995, all information about the personnel of the Delegation in this historical account is found here in this chapter, located at the end of year 1998, under the name of “PERSONNEL”.

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1995 - RADICAL MEMBERS - SOUTH SUDANESE CONFRERES:

Serving the mission in other provinces at the start of the SS. Delegation: Fr. Mödi Abel Nyorko, Fr. Ukello Yala Joseph, Adot Oryem Albino, Fr. Magalasi Peter. *Fr. Ayon Hector Oyiamute was for experience out of community attached to the diocese of Torit from 1992 to 1996.*

ON BASIC FORMATION

Scholastics on temporary vows::

- Okot Ochermoi Louis Tony (Nairobi)
- Milla Aventore Jimmy (Rome)
- Mawa Bosco Anthony (Peru)
- Sc. Lako Martin (Elstree Scholasticate).

Noviciate of Namugongo:

- Francis Okeny, Joseph Taban, Paul Idra,

END OF YEAR 1995

**TOTAL NUMBER of confreres in the
SS.Delegation working in/for the “Liberated
Areas” of Sudan are: 19 confreres (with Mgr. C.
Mazzolari): (14 Priests and 5 Brothers).**

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1996 - CONFRERES ASSIGNED TO THE SS.DELEGATION

Bro. Iacomella Raniero, Fr. Galarza Fernando, Fr. Perez
Caporal Jeronimo, Bro. Zonta Mariano, Fr. Sciannameo
Felice,¹³² La Braca Antonio, Fr. Pax Raymond, Fr. Ambrosi
Giuseppe¹³³ Fr. Ayon Hector Oyamute.

Thus a total of 9 confreres were assigned during this year to
the SS.Delegation.

END OF YEAR 1996

**TOTAL NUMBER of confreres in the
SS.Delegation working in/for the “Liberated
Areas” of Sudan are: 28 confreres (with Mgr. C.
Mazzolari): (21 Priests and 7 Brothers).**

=====

1997 - CONFRERES ASSIGNED TO SS. DELEGATION

- Fr. Magni Eugenio
- Bro. Gonzalez Armando Ramos, appointed
on 01/07/1997
- Fr. Gottardi Gaetano¹³⁴
- Fr. Jose' Flores.

- Confreres who changed province:

- Fr. J.B.Zanardi (Back to Italy)
- Fr. Sciannameo Felice (Back to Italy)

¹³² Kocoo from the end of January to December 1996.

¹³³ 29/10/1996 appointed to Narus from the Kenya Province until
09/03/1998.

¹³⁴ Borrowed from the Italian Province

1997-RADICAL SOUTH SUDANESE CONFRERES:

Radical members serving the mission in other provinces

Since 1995: Fr. Mödi Abel Nyorko, Fr. Ukello Yala Joseph, Adot Oryem Albino, Fr. Magalasi Peter.

Starting from 1997: Fr. Okot Ochermoi Louis Tony (Peru)¹³⁵ – Fr. Milla Aventore Jimmy (Malawi/Zambia)¹³⁶ - Fr. Mawa Bosco Anthony (Uganda)¹³⁷.

Radical members serving the mission in South Sudan

Fr. Ayon Hector Oyamute.

IN FORMATION,

on Temporary Vows:

Sc. Lako Martin (Elstree Scholasticate).

Sc. Idra Paul,¹³⁸ (Nairobi Scholasticate).

Bro. Okeny Francis, Bro. Taban Joseph,
(Brother Centre-Nairobi)

END OF YEAR 1997

**TOTAL NUMBER of confreres in the
SS.Delegation working in/for the “Liberated
Areas” of Sudan are 30 confreres (with Mgr. C.
Mazzolari): (22 Priests and 8 Brothers).**

¹³⁵ **Province of Peru:** Born 1.1.67, Iboni, dioc. Torit (SD), T. 24.4.93 - P. 22.12.96 - O. 25.5.97. Namugongo 91-93; Nairobi 93-97;**PE 97-09; SS 09-**

¹³⁶ **Province of Malawi/Zambia:** Born on 23.11.64, Kerepi, dioc. Torit (SD), T. 24.4.93 - P. 7.12.96 - O. 12.7.97. Namugongo 91-93; Roma 93-97;
MZ 97-01; SS 01-11; U 12; SS 12-

¹³⁷ **Province of Uganda:** dioc. Torit (SD), T. 24.4.93 - P. , O. . Namugongo 91-93; Peru 93-97; **U 97-.... SS...**

¹³⁸ **Fr. Idra Paul:** Born. 24.6.70, Bibia, dioc. Arua (U), T. 10.5.97 - P. 16.12.00 - O. 14.7.01. Namugongo 95-97; Nairobi 97-01; **SS 01-04; EC 05-**

=====

1998 – CONFRERES: new assignments and shifts

New assignments

- **Fr. Bettini Ezio** 30/10.1998 appointed to SS.Delegation starting from 01/01/1999
- **Fr. Eisman Torres Alberto Jesus**, appointed to NZARA 01/06/98
- **Fr. Gottardi Silvano**, appointed to SS.Delegation 01/07/1998. Parish Priest of Yirol (Holy Cross Parish).
- **Fr. Mitiku Habte Cheksa** 31/10/1998 appointed to Narus / Torit Dioc.
- **Fr. Zuniga Roy Carlo** Appointed to SS.Delegation 01/07/1998. Appointed to Leer 01/09/1998.
- Bro Belotti Giuseppe Eugenio (*short experience in Narus no appointment*)

Shifts of Community

- **Bro. Confalonieri Ambrogio**, 17/06/97 temporarily appointed to Narus; 28/01/98 reconfirmed to Narus.
- **Fr. Martinez Jose' Louis**, Dec. 96 end with Nzara. 17/03/97 appointment to Marial Lou.
- **Fr. Mattevi Alfredo**, Appointed to Mapuordit 20/02/98
- **Fr. Riva Mario**, appointed to Agang Rial 13/02/1998.
- **Fr. A. La Braca, Juaibor**, in the "Central Nuer region" opened in October 1998.
- **Ritterbecks Hans Dieter Bro.**, Nuer project May 1995. Leer Jan. 1996. **Juaibor**, October 1998
- **Fr. Ayon Hector** Oyiamute, appointed to Agang Rial.

Confreres who changed province:

- **Fr. Ambrosi Giuseppe**, back to the Kenya Province.

Perpetual vows: Sc. Lako Martin,¹³⁹ Scholasticate of Elstree on 10.10.1998

END OF 1998: RADICAL MEMBERS:

*Radical members serving the mission
in other provinces*

Since 1995: Fr. Mödi Abel Nyorko, Fr. Ukello Yala Joseph, Adot Oryem Albino, Fr. Magalasi Peter.

Starting from 1997: Fr. Okot Ochermoi Louis Tony (Peru) - **Fr. Milla Aventore Jimmy** (Malawi/Zambia) - **Fr. Mawa Bosco Anthony** (Uganda).

*Radical members serving the mission
in South Sudan*

Fr. Ayon Hector Oyamute.

ON BASIC FORMATION

Sc. Lako Martin,
(Perpetual vows - Elstree Scholasticate).
Sc. Idra Paul,¹⁴⁰ (Nairobi Scholasticate).
Bro. Okeny Francis, Bro. Taban Joseph,
(Brother Centre-Nairobi)

¹³⁹ **Fr. Lako Martin**, Born 1.1.63, Rijong, d. Juba (SD), T. 20.5.95 - P. 10.10.98 - O. 3.10.99

Namugongo 93-95; Elstree 95-99; **EG 99-01; KH 01-13; SS 13-**

¹⁴⁰ **Fr. Idra Paul**: Born. 24.6.70, Bibia, dioc. Arua (U), T. 10.5.97 - P. 16.12.00 - O. 14.7.01. Namugongo 95-97; Nairobi 97-01; **SS 01-04; EC 05-**

At the end of 1998, the total number of radical members were 12 (9 with perpetual vows and 3 with temporary ones). 7 were on missionary service to other provinces and 1 in the South Sudan Delegation.

PERSONNEL AT THE END OF YEAR 1998

THE TOTAL NUMBER of confreres in the South Sudan Delegation working in/for the “Liberated Areas” of Sudan at the close of year 1998 was 35 (with Mgr. C. Mazzolari): (26 Priests and 9 Brothers).

Mgr. Cesare Mazzolari will be consecrated bishop in St. Peter Basilica, Rome, by Pope John Paul II on January the 6th 1999, feast of the Epiphany.

COLLABORATION WITH OTHER ENTITIES/NGOs.

The collaboration with other entities and NGOs during the time of war was regular and necessary for different reasons especially humanitarian: assistance, education, health, food distribution, water programmes, communication, flights coordination etc. like OLS, MSF, WV. NPA, NCA, CRS, JRS, and at level of churches the NSCC. Flying Companies eg. TRACKMARK LTD.¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ OLS = Operation Lifeline Sudan; MSF = Medicine Sans Frontiere; WV = World Vision; NPA Norwegian People Aid; NCA = Norwegian Church Aid; CRS = Catholic Relief Service; JRS = Jesuit Refugee service; NSCC = New Sudan Council of Churches; Flying Companies eg. TRACKMARK LTD.

MCCJ and CMS:

In the “Liberated Areas”, the places where the Comboni Missionaries worked in collaboration with the Comboni Missionary Sisters between 1990 and 1998 were:

- **NZARA** since 1991, working in education, nursery school, primary and intermediate school, health care and pastoral work.
- **MARIAL LOU** since 1995, working in women promotion and pastoral.
- **LEER** since 1996, working in pastoral and health care (1996-1998)

OTHER CONGREGATION OF SISTERS:

The places where there were other congregations of sisters were:

- **MAPUORDIT** with the DOLSH (the Daughters of Our Lady of Sacred Heart) from Australia, since 1995, with involvement in health care, school and pastoral.
- **KOCOA** the MSMMC (the Missionary Sisters of Mary Mother of the Church from Lira - Uganda) at the service of St. Mary Seminary and refugee work since 1992 and the SHS (Sacred Heart Sisters) from Adjumani Parish.
- **NARUS:** the MSMMC also mainly for primary school, but also for pastoral work, since 1993.

SPLA/M, SSIM/A LOCAL AUTHORITIES, PERMITS

The relationship with local civil and military authorities was always brought forward with respect and as much as possible

in a positive collaborative way. Surely with the local traditional authorities the relationship revealed itself much easier than with the military ones with which, sometimes, it reached braking point. The main reasons were the arrogant military approach normally used by them, the abuse of people and of human rights. On the side of Comboni personnel some difficulties were caused by the characters of individual confreres. However, in general, the co-existence was good enough to allow the work to go on also in tough moments.

With the official people of the movement in charge of permits like the SRRA (Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Agency) and the correspondent agency of the Nassir Group, except for some difficult cases, normally there was no problem as long as the application were made through the right channels like Dioceses, New Sudan Council of Churches, Organizations etc.

Of course, the complaint was the short term permit in need to be renewed frequently, the money to be paid and the place where to renew it, eg. Nairobi. Other times the problem was the narrow mind of the officer in charge who wanted to make people feel the weight of his authority, but on the whole things could be worked out with patience.

CAUSE OF THE CONFLICT NORTH-SOUTH

The common refrain of the people of the press was that the *“South Christian and Animist”* was fighting the *“North Arab and Moslem”* and vice versa. Simplification is never the best way to understand a much more complex reality. In fact the real problem was *“racial/ethnic”* more than religious. The incapacity of accepting and respecting that Sudan (North and South) is a *“multi-racial”-“multi-ethnic”* and a *“Multi-religious”* country and that its people needs to learn how to

live this multiple reality in a positive and constructive way in Sudan, both in the North and in the South.

The Arabs of the North were considering themselves as the **“first class citizens”** and all the others a **“second class one”**. The term **“slaves”** was commonly used by the Arab of the north in relation to other tribes. The focus was on Arabisation and Islamisation of the South. Islamization was the consequence of Arabisation, which meant first the forced wiping away of the historical and ethnical identity of all the other ethnic groups and then the imposition of Islam as the only religion.

To show that the religious factor was not the real problem, we should look at other tribes in the north who are Moslems and, therefore, if the religious matter was the real one, they should have been treated well and with equality. In reality, it is the ethnic identity that creates the problem of the discrepancy of treatment (development, schools, shared wealth), combined with the narrow mind and the interests of the oligarchy of Khartoum / Omdurman Arabs.

In this way, it was more a case of the supremacy of an Arab oligarchy on the rest of the country and, therefore, a question of abuse of human rights and unfair social treatment of other ethnic groups, especially those of the South, the real root cause of all evils. The Religious imposition of Islam was just another abuse on the same line in order to keep people also under a religious slavery, thus using religion to enforce the political legacy of power.

Of course, to touch a very essential reality of a human person and of ethnic groups like the religious beliefs, the freedom of faith and the style of life and culture which they bring with them, would certainly cause a strong reaction which, together

with the social one, would certainly bring people into a violent struggle. Thus, the long years of struggle and war for “self-determination” until the South reached its independence.

ECUMENICAL COMMITMENT

Moslems, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and other churches.

During the war, in the “Liberated Areas”, the number of Moslems was very low and it was not a problem for people. Not only but, in a normal village life, Moslem people were respected as were the Christians, and in the families you could, sometimes, have Moslem and Christian members living together without problem.

The real challenge, instead, was the relationship among people belonging to different Christian churches because, since the time of the British in 1905, the country was divided into different areas called “*Mission Spheres*”. This reality was particularly felt in relation to the Presbyterians in Unity State and Jonglei and with the Episcopalians in the Lakes State and other areas. The ecumenical work did not go very deep and the relationship was very loose. However, the work of creating better understanding was there, but needed to be intensified.

One church organization which helped a lot to keep churches united in tackling together problems of various kind was the NSCC (the New Sudan Council of Churches). It both helped the inter-church-relationship and the relationship with the civil and military authorities in the liberated areas.

NSCC was also a means to foster advocacy for South Sudan issues in the world and make the “Churches” speak with one

voice about various issues affecting South Sudan like the evil of war, distraction, abuse of human rights, humanitarian disasters, lack of religious freedom, etc.

At more local level the relationship with other churches depended on the availability and sensitivity of the Confreres, especially parish priests, and of the Protestant Pastors to engage in ecumenical gathering, prayers, sharing of the Word of God and other particular occasions when unity among church congregations would help to create unity also in the civil society or on occasion of special events. Sometimes relationship was difficult due to suspicion, prejudice and fear that this may be used as a means of proselytising.

CONCLUSION of the historical account from July 1990 to December 31st 1998.

About the starting of the “NEW SUDAN GROUP”, its juridical development into the “SOUTH DELEGATION” and the work of evangelisation done by the confreres belonging to them, much more could have been said and also in a more detailed form, especially in connection with the “SPLA/M”, “SSIM/A” Liberation Movements, and other political and military realities affecting South Sudan during the Comboni Missionary presence.

However, this is sufficient to give and outline of the Comboni commitment to their “evangelising presence” within the “Local Church” in a very critical time of the history of Sudan and put in evidence the special love for the populations of “Southern Sudan” who were those directly targeted by the war and, with devilish accuracy and evil mind, kept fighting each other by a government in Khartoum which was intelligently exploiting the tribal division and the divisions caused by the struggle for power within army commanders to Khartoum own interest.

“Divide et impera”¹⁴² was the Roman motto at the time of the “Caesars”. This motto of “dividing in order to rule” was masterly done and carried out in the Sudan, especially in the South by the Arabs in the Khartoum Government. The work of the Church and of the Comboni Missionaries was instead the one of creating new bonds of friendship and communion, through reconciliation and love, which is at the heart of the Gospel.

¹⁴² **“Divide et impera” = “divide and rule”**: a policy which was intended to keep Khartoum Government and the Arabs in a position of power by causing disagreements between people and South Sudanese leaders who might otherwise unite against them.

The presence of the Comboni Missionaries in this critical time of war, suffering and displacement was motivated by the desire of being ***“Signs of Hope”*** in hopeless situations, as it was said at the time the confreres proposed to remain one group: ***“Where our South Sudanese people are, there we will be, where they will move, there we will move with them, if we need to go out from one door, we will try to enter through another one.”***

This implied a continuous monitoring of the situation in its development in order to keep together enough “safety” in the risky situation, and work peacefully enough to allow the work to go on regularly. It also implied to foresee and plan “safety withdrawal” from the places more at risk through a regular follow up of OLS security briefing and quick access to “rescue flights”, normally done from Nairobi Wilson Airport or from Lokichokio, on the north-western border of Kenya with Southern Sudan.

Finally, the fact that the writer of this historical account is the person who was entrusted with the responsibility of “Co-ordinator” of the “New Sudan Group” from 1992 to 1994 and of “Superior Delegate” from 1995 to 1998, gives this account the taste of “personal witness”. He himself went through and shared in full the joys and anxieties, the hopes and the fruits of this “evangelising enterprise”, together with the confreres mentioned all along the account.

Throughout all this time, these confreres were that ***“Cenacle of Apostles”*** from which ***“the rays of faith, hope and love of Jesus”*** were coming out and enlightening the darkness of war and the sufferings of the people of Southern Sudan among whom they were living, sharing and hoping together for a better future.

***“Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus Christ,
love him tenderly
and seek always to understand more fully
the meaning of a God
who died on the cross
for the salvation of souls”***

(St. Daniel Comboni: Writings no. 2721)

Historical account by:

Fr. Francesco Chemello Odiongo Gatwic, mccj.

*Comboni Missionaries – Leer – Unity State
Republic of South Sudan
September the 8th 2014*

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