

## **THE ROLES OF COMBONI MISSIONARIES IN PALORINYA REFUGEE SETTLEMENT, MOYO UGANDA**

This article aims at appreciating the role of Comboni Missionaries in helping South Sudanese refugees in this settlement. Comboni Missionaries is one of the active church organizations that helps South Sudanese refugees irrespective of their religious or ethnic background.

When the war broke out in Kajokeji, the southern part of South Sudan in 2016, many people of Kajokeji were displaced to the neighboring district of Moyo in Uganda to seek refuge. The Comboni fathers, brothers and sisters had to follow their displaced Christians up to the refugee camps to continue strengthening the faith of their Christians who were traumatized by the conflict.

These Missionaries had started praying under the trees with their Christians when they were first settled, administering the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Eucharist. Now they have opened a number of chapels in these camps showing their love for South Sudanese people, living with them and revealing the gifts of God and the passion Jesus Christ to them. The presence of Comboni Missionaries in these camps has led to a tremendous improvement in spirituality among the refugees from different regions of South Sudan.

### **Spiritual activities:**

The Comboni Missionaries in Palorinya settlement are serving 250.000 South Sudanese refugees. Their presence among the suffering refugees is helping the South Sudanese getting out of their difficult situation. Father Jesus Aranda and Father Martin Arnanz in their pastoral work have made a fantastic contribution in the growing of the Catholic faith in refugee camps. Their pastoral activities has attracted many to receive sacraments. Now the number of Catholic faithful has drastically increased. There is also a quite a good number of altar servants. Father Jesus Aranda has devoted himself to giving spiritual training like Bible sharing, workshops to strengthen altar servants spiritually. Many of them are now admiring priestly life because of the love shown by Comboni missionaries. This has made the youth and Christians to nick name Father Jesus Aranda **'the head of altar servants'**.

Father Jesus Aranda also organizes Bible sharing for Christians, Catechists and youth in this settlement. He also conducts workshops on peace and justice. This has been appreciated by many Christians. Thus I want to thank the Comboni Missionaries and their superiors for the work they have done. In particular I thank the Comboni Missionaries' superiors for sending us committed Fathers, Sisters and Brother who have accepted to face hardship in their lives because of the people they love to serve. Their being among us the refugees, sharing the challenges with our suffering people has built a strong foundation for our faith. These are the only white people who have made themselves simple and servants of the poor. 'He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away with empty hands' (Lk 1:53).

Currently, the Missionaries are serving a number of Catholic faithful from different regions of South Sudan. This has made the destitute South Sudanese people to forget their difficult moment and put their trust and faith in Jesus Christ. 'Our Lord is merciful and tender. He will cause the bright dawn of salvation to rise on us and shine from heaven on all those who live in the dark shadow of death.'(LK 1:78-79).

For this reason, I want to appreciate the Catholic Church's role in helping the South Sudanese in their agony and predicament caused by the current conflict in the country. The good work of the Comboni Missionaries in helping the refugees has made me to give an account of their good and marvelous work, for the refugees in Palorinya refugee settlement. Their assistance to the vulnerable people and support given particularly to the orphans deserves our appreciation.

### **Assistance given by Comboni Missionaries to refugees.**

The Comboni Missionaries' Sisters have been helping the refugees in different activities in the centers they are operating. They are engaging the women whose husbands were killed or left South Sudan to participate in spiritual activities like Bible sharing, organizing workshop for women and income generating activities like money savings. This has made the women who are traumatized to gain confidence, trust in Christ, and improved standard of living. Currently, women in some chapels in Palorinya refugees' settlement are engaged in preparing clean drinking water for themselves. This is not only done to Catholic women, but to South Sudanese women regardless of their religions and ethnicity.

Comboni Brothers have also tried their best, especially Brother Eric Fischnaller who is currently playing a great role in distributing food to over 500 hundred families in this settlement. He distributes maize flour, sugar, beans and rice to particularly vulnerable and people with disability. Those vulnerable people who cannot afford to buy sugar and rice are at least getting something from Comboni brothers. 'Whoever has two shirts must give one to the man who has none, and whoever has food must share it.' (Lk 3:11). This is done to add to the little food ratio given to refugees. Each refugee in this settlement is given 12 kilograms of maize, 3 kilograms of beans and 2 liters of cooking oil. This food is insufficient to those vulnerable or disabled people who are alone.

### **Comboni missionaries support in the field of Education:**

Education as one of the backbone of modern states in the world and it has vital role to play in the promotion of respect of human rights as stipulated in the universal declaration of human rights of 1948. Article 26 states: "education shall be directed to the full development of human personality and respect of human rights." This is supported by UNHCR 1997 that states that, "the goals of refugee education is to provide knowledge, skill, attitude and value necessary for survival, improvement of quality of life the ability to adapt to a changing world." But for the refugees in this settlement the statement of the Universal Declaration of Human Right 1948 is not true.

In this settlement, South Sudanese are facing many challenges in having access to quality education. Many orphans whose parents were killed in the conflict in South Sudan have no access to good education. Many have now dropped out of schools due to lack of scholarship. Last year, when we first settled in this camp, many students were completely traumatized. Those who came from South Sudan and were in secondary schools did not get any school at all. Those whose parents were forced to leave couldn't have access to education in the camps. Many youth thus resorted to drinking, early marriage and unproductive activities as the last resort. But with the help of Comboni Missionaries and parents a secondary school was established to help children in one of the zones in Palorinya refugee settlement. This school is currently attracting many students

in the zone. But still, the challenge is that many of the parents particularly the widows and the vulnerable cannot afford to pay the school fee for their sons and daughters. Many of South Sudanese children, apart from primary pupils, are now dawdling within the camps while others are risking to go back to South Sudan as last option. But despite that, this secondary school initiated by parents now has a good number of students, about 500 with more than twenty South Sudanese teachers volunteering to teach their brothers and sisters. Comboni Missionaries were able to build one semi-permanent class room block with six rooms, a temporary library and laboratory. They managed to equip the school with a few school items for science classes.

UNESCO 2011 report as cited in Breidlid( 2013) stated that ‘ the rate of illiteracy in South Sudan was over 80%, between 1% to 2% of the female finish primary school which is probably the worse situation globally coupling with the current obnoxious bloody conflict in the country”. He who gives education to the poor and orphans is serving thousands of generations in South Sudan .The future and sustainable peace in South Sudan is in education. I am quite sure that education given to South Sudanese children in this school initiated by parents with the help of Comboni Missionaries will one day produce competent leaders who would promote peace, love and justice in South Sudan.

The Missionaries sponsor some South Sudanese orphans in two secondary schools of Itula and Idiwa in Palorinya refugee settlement. This help given to indigent South Sudanese refugees has made many of us to understand the slogan of St. Daniel Comboni, ‘**save Africa by Africans**’. I want to thank the supporters of the Comboni Missionaries who have made us to realize the love and concern they have for suffering South Sudanese refugees. Many thanks to father Jesus Aranda, father Martin Aranz, Brother Erich Fischnaller, Brother Papa Peter and the Comboni Sisters for working for South Sudanese refugees in Palorinya refugee settlement Moyo Uganda.

Some orphans are grateful to the Comboni Missionaries who have played a great role in building the Idiwa parents’ secondary school and giving new hope for their future. “I was not chased out of school because of school fee, said one of the orphans, because of the support I am getting from Comboni Missionaries. I was able to perform very well this term.’

Another student also expressed his view saying: “I thank the Comboni Missionaries for their support to orphans like me. Without them, I would have dropped out of school last year, but I thank God that an orphan like me is now able to be in school due to the presence of Comboni Missionaries in this settlement. I am appealing to Comboni Missionaries to continue supporting the needy people like us so that when we return back home to South Sudan, we shall be able to serve our people”.

**Conclusion,** I write this article on behalf of South Sudanese refugees particularly, the orphan students, teachers of Idiwa secondary school and Christians of St. Daniel Comboni Chapel to appreciate the contribution of Comboni Missionaries to South Sudanese refugees in the field of education, spirituality and in giving assistance to the destitutes. I am one of the refugees in Palorinya settlement, a teacher at Idiwa parents’ Secondary School and a Catholic faithful. The scholarship given to our young brothers and sisters by Comboni Missionaries is seen as a great gift that will give new light and hope to our young brothers, sisters and South Sudanese people. I

would like in a special way to thank the supporters of the Comboni Missionaries whose helping hands, through the Comboni Missionaries, have reached us. May you continue supporting the commitment of the Comboni Missionaries working for South Sudanese refugees in this settlement so that they give more support to South Sudanese in the field of education and spirituality. I wish that more committed Missionaries would come to South Sudan to give a hand to Fr. Jesus and Fr. Martin so that the wounds of South Sudanese inflicted by the current conflict would heal.