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PRESS STATEMENT

30th October 2016

MEETING OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS WITH THE PRINCIPAL RELIGIOUS LEADERS OF SOUTH SUDAN

"We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed but not in despair." (2 Corinthians 4:8).

Brothers and sisters, Peace be with you!

Thank you for joining us at this press conference. We would like to share with you our experiences on our trip to Rome, Italy between 26th and 30th October 2016.

We were invited by the Holy Father Pope Francis as religious leaders of South Sudan and we came representing the South Sudan Council of Churches – our Church of South Sudan.

On 27th October 2016 the Holy Father Pope Francis received our delegation of Archbishop Paulino LUKUDU LORO, the Metropolitan Archbishop of JUBA, Archbishop Dr. Daniel DENG BUL YAK, Archbishop and Primate of the Province of the Episcopal Church of South Sudan and Sudan, and Rt. Rev. Moderator Peter GAI LUAL MARROW, Chairman of South Sudan Council of Churches and the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan and Sudan as well as the General Secretary of the South Sudan Council of Churches, Fr. James OYET LATANSIO.

The Holy Father asked us to come to see him to hear from us about the situation in South Sudan, to show his concern, to encourage us that he is praying for the people and to ask what he, as the Head of Catholic Church, can do. We shared with him about the situation, how the Church is facing it and the initiatives the Church is undertaking in peace, healing and reconciliation.

The Holy Father was deeply touched and expressed his concern for the suffering people of South Sudan. He appreciated the role of the Church in the journey towards peace in the country and also the strong spirit of ecumenism. Since he has now been invited three times to visit South Sudan (firstly by His Excellency President Salva Kiir Mayardit, secondly by the South Sudan Catholic Bishops' Conference and lastly by our ecumenical church delegation), he responded, "I will come." We asked him to continue to accompany South Sudan, its leaders and the Church in his prayers.

Later, we met with the Vatican media who asked many questions about South Sudan. South Sudan is in the eyes of the world and we shared our impressions about the meeting with the Holy Father and our hopes for peace, healing and reconciliation. We have also had the opportunity to share with the Vatican's Secretariat of State where views were exchanged and where an expression of a desire to help.

On 28th October we met with the Deputy Head of Mission Mrs. Natalina Mou and the staff of the Embassy of the Republic of South Sudan to Italy. We shared with them on our meetings at the Vatican, while we encouraged them on the journey towards peace, healing and reconciliation.

We thank God that we have returned safely and will pray for the safe return of the remaining members of the delegation who are still on their way.

We want to encourage the people of South Sudan, in the same way the Holy Father encouraged us as we all search for peace, healing and reconciliation. We urge you to stop rumours and hate speech, we are one people. We are praying for you constantly, the world church is encouraging you and praying for you, please pray for one another! We are not abandoned, there is hope!

May God bless you and may God bless South Sudan!

Thank you!

