



Diocesan Synod

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| Paper Reference | 6 Sudans Partnership Link |
| Meeting and Date | 25 th February 2026 |
| Paper Submitted by | From Standing Committee (Bishop’s Council) meeting of November 2025. Canon Ian Woodward. |
| Background including any previous outcome(s) | <p>The Diocese of Salisbury–Sudans Partnership has a long history of support to the people and Episcopal Churches in Sudan and South Sudan. Founded in 1973 with a focus on training for a better educated clergy it has developed to include theological colleges and the evolving Episcopal University in South Sudan and selected schools in both countries. Since independence from the Anglo–Egyptian condominium in 1956 Sudan, and subsequently South Sudan following its own independence in 2011, there has been incessant conflict. Much of it ethnically driven as well as being impacted by regional and global interests. More recently in Sudan, savage fighting between warlords has created the world’s worst humanitarian crisis.</p> <p>The Salisbury–Sudans Partnership is based on mutuality: based on the idea that two churches separated by distance and culture can care for one another in sharing resources, experience, and practical help.</p> <p>We seek in all that we do to share the love of Jesus Christ in mutual prayer and action focused on Education at various levels, Advocacy with Humanitarian Aid, and Health Care.</p> |
| What is required of this meeting? <i>Note/Receive/Decision/Action</i> | To note and raise questions |

Salisbury–Sudans Partnership Background Briefing Note

Most of the dioceses in the Church of England have a relational link with another province or diocese in the Anglican Communion. The Diocese of Salisbury’s partnership is with the two provinces of Sudan and South Sudan and the Episcopal churches there. It was established by Bishop George Reindorp in 1973 under the persuasion of Archbishop Michael Ramsey who was concerned that Sudan and the Episcopal Church there was somewhat friendless.

Our Partnership is accountable to the Bishop of Salisbury and the Bishop's Council with the support of the Diocesan Board of Finance for which we are very thankful.

On the 17th March 1973, the Diocese of Salisbury's Synod approved the *motion 'to forge and maintain a direct link between the Dioceses of Sarum and Sudan to strengthen their mutual friendship and support'*. In those days there was only the country of Sudan and the Episcopal Church thereof. Historically, the Church Missionary Society (as it was then) began work in Omdurman in 1899 and also spread rapidly among the black Africans of the southern region from Uganda and Kenya. Though much earlier in the first millennium, Christianity had also ventured down through Egypt and Ethiopia into Africa but was thwarted somewhat by the emergence of Islam. Until 1974, the diocese of Sudan (then Africa's biggest country in terms of land mass) was part of the Archbishopric of Jerusalem. It reverted to the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Canterbury when the new province consisting of four dioceses was established in 1976. In 1983 the Islamic government in Khartoum included sharia law in their constitution to enforce Islam which was just one of the triggers to a need for the south to be independent. In 1986 there were 11 dioceses and in 1992, 24. This was, in part, due to leadership crises – including a time when there were two primates because one refused to step down having reached the stipulated retirement age and his tribal support helped sustain him causing considerable division, from which the Church is not immune today, nearly 40 years later.

In 2011 after a well organised referendum and subsequent plebiscite overseen by international observers including the World Council of Churches, the southern region was granted independence and became South Sudan and the Church there as the Episcopal Church of South Sudan which now has over 50 dioceses and some 70 bishops and assistant bishops. Sadly, within 18 months of independence, civil war broke out again in South Sudan and peace talks amongst the warring leaders of South Sudan took until 2018 to be achieved.

Even today, peace within South Sudan is fragile with the president incarcerating his vice-president on charges of murder.

In Sudan, 85% of the population is generally Moslem with the balance Christians and other faith minorities. In South Sudan it is an approximate opposite with 85% thought to be Christian and a balance Moslems and animists etc. The ECS in Sudan has six dioceses and seven bishops. Originally headquartered in Khartoum, the violent, destructive and arguably genocidal conflict over nearly three years forced the Primate, Archbishop Ezekiel Kondo and his family and staff, with our help and other partners, to relocate to Port Sudan on the Red Sea coast. In Sudan, civil strife and armed conflict, often with serious tribal undertones of Arab versus African and a constant flow of refugees continue to challenge all the Churches. Yet they continue to witness heroically to their faith in Jesus Christ, to inspire the wider Anglican Communion and its people and ecumenical partners.

Purpose and Priorities

Fundamentally, the Salisbury–Sudans Partnership is founded on, and rooted in, mutual prayer and fellowship with our brothers and sisters in the Episcopal Churches in Sudan and South Sudan, and all the people, tribes and faiths in Sudan and South Sudan. In the early days of our partnership and consultation with the then ECS, Salisbury recognised the great need for the Church to have very much better educated clergy and took on the support of theological education as a priority of the relationship, which continues today. But to have theologically educated clergy there has to be effective education in schools starting at primary and then secondary levels and subsequently in college including now in the Episcopal University currently centred in Juba and again, hopefully, in Khartoum and Omdurman, when peace is

restored there. Remarkably, in South Sudan, the church saw significant growth despite relentless tribal fighting – in part as an antidote to the misery of conflict.

Whilst the partnership began more than 50 years ago initially supporting the serious lack of theological education in the Episcopal Church, it is education and health that are the universal necessities that undergird every civilised and progressive society, together with the rule of law and democratic freedoms.

Education

It became obvious that if theological education was to be effectively delivered, basic education levels in Sudan had to be drastically improved. So many clergy had little education beyond primary levels.

This cameo illustrates the situation: *there was a time in the 1990s/early 2000s in the Diocese of Bor in central southern Sudan which was immersed in tribal fighting, and the dedicated and inspirational bishop there rightly saw the Church as a key potential instrument of peaceful development and pastoral care. He faithfully went amongst his diocese often in his dug-out canoe, especially in the flooded rainy season in his Nilotic region, ordaining likely young men as priests mostly of whom were without any secondary or higher education. His purpose was to prioritise pastoral care in the midst of unending conflict above education and other basic needs.* But this short-term solution created expectations amongst the clergy that could not, in practice, be fulfilled by the Episcopal Church.

Today we support five theological colleges including those that are part of the dispersed TEU (The Episcopal University) currently headquartered in Juba and in due course will have a campus in Rokon, some 50 miles northwest of Juba. The Primate of South Sudan, Archbishop Justin Badi, is the Chancellor, and the Vice Chancellor is Eeva John, formerly coordinator of the Church of England's Living in Love and Faith initiative. A UK support group was registered as a charity in 2014 and provides a way of sending money safely and monitoring how it is spent. A member of the TEU project sits on the Salisbury-Sudans Education committee and can propose projects in TEU that might warrant support.

We deliver our educational priorities through an Education sub-committee whose Chair and other experienced educators are part of the main committee. It also embraces the creation and development of the Juba Diocese Model Secondary School (JDMSS) which has grown exponentially in recent years and is now the best performing secondary school in South Sudan. We continue to provide some funding and much advice as we have done from the beginning of the project, which from the outset started as a co-educational institution. The pupils include many children of South Sudan government officials and ministers and some former pupils are now going on to university.

Health care is our second principal priority delivered by our Salisbury-Sudans Medical Link. SML has its own sub-committee and their Chair and Vice Chair sit on the Sudans partnership main committee. Their committee includes a number of retired medical practitioners and specialists and is well supported across our diocese including through the annual South Canonry Fete and many other enterprising initiatives.

South Sudan has amongst the lowest levels of health care and particularly maternity services in the world with consequentially amongst the highest levels of neo-natal deaths. Ironically, and understandably, the extent of the medical needs and the humane response to the appeals tugs at the generous heart strings of our Churches in Dorset and Wiltshire. In addition to the provision of medications to some 16 diocesan clinics we also support training programmes for clinical officers and midwives.

Deanery Links

One of the unique features of our partnership within the Anglican Communion is the involvement of our

Deaneries and the Deanery Links that enable a partnership with a diocese in the ECS and ECSS to be shared across a number of parishes within a deanery. The enthusiasm of the Rural Deans is understandably variable as they usually inherited a deanery link that came with their appointment whilst often overseeing increasing numbers of parishes.

Approximately 15 of our 19 deaneries have a link with Sudan or South Sudan, the majority with the latter and some are more active than others. We usually have an annual Deanery Links Day and the next is being planned for 2026. We have a dedicated Deanery Links member on our main committee and updated cycles of prayer are being developed to strengthen the breadth and depth of our overall partnership.

Our updated prayer cycles will also include our medical activities and the clinics we support. Two of our Deanery Links are a little more independent. For example, The Poole Deanery is linked with the diocese of Wau. It is an independent charity, and they provide their own transfers of funds arrangements, but we continue to share their concerns in mutual prayer meetings and thanksgivings for their partnership.

Advocacy, Government Relations and Humanitarian Aid

Whilst our support and help for the two provinces is conducted directly with the Primates and Bishops and diocesan partners in the Sudans, it is very difficult to get them to directly instigate peace overtures with the multiple parties in innumerable conflicts.

If an abiding peace is to be established in the two Sudans it is not sufficient to only provide education, health and humanitarian aid etc through our partnership.

We need to help sustain HM government's long-standing support – pushing at both ends as it were, to create and sustain peace and prosperity locally and nationally.

With this in mind we actively support the Sudans APPG (All Party Parliamentary Group) through which we share and contribute knowledge and intelligence updates and try to hold the HM Government to account, regularly sharing mutual briefings with FCDO (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office) staff. Full membership is confined to MPs and Peers but we regularly attend the meetings at the Chair's invitation. Subject to the ongoing security situations, we work with our two ambassadors, in Juba for South Sudan and, temporarily in Addis Ababa for Sudan, because of the conflict in Sudan and are able to meet with them on their return trips to Whitehall. We are able to access and enjoy the co-operation of the Middle East and North Africa region team at Chatham House and the Sudans faculty in St Anthony's college in Oxford for periodic presentations and discussions by knowledgeable experts and usually attended by the Sudanese and South Sudanese diaspora in the UK.

The UK, through the FCDO and the Sudans Unit therein, have particular responsibilities as the United Nations 'Penholder' for the Sudans. In practice this means that motions, reports and resolutions in the UN Security Council (UNSC) are drafted and presented by the UK's permanent representative with the support of the FCDO to the Council. It also means that as a permanent UNSC member we have ongoing responsibilities to deliver positive results and find ways to peace.

The recently elected new chair of the APPG is Anneliese Dodds MP member for Oxford East who was Minister for Overseas Development Aid in the present government, but she resigned her office when significant cuts to the ODA budget in favour of an increase our defence expenditure were announced in February 2025.

'Soft power' through ODA can be very effective, but it is all too easily ignored, often because it needs time to gestate.

The reality from a UK perspective is that Defence and ODA budgets both need to be strengthened in our challenging and uncertain world.

Christian Aid, Ecumenical Relationships and Peace Initiatives

We enjoy a special and longstanding partnership with Christian Aid which operates principally in South Sudan though with Christian Aid we have recently been exploring links with Norwegian Church Aid on an education project in Sudan. We also enjoy a longstanding partnership with the Episcopal Church in the United States – know as AFRECS – American Friends of the Episcopal Churches of the Sudans. This involves regular and frequent conference calls and joint funding of some projects.

Through Christian Aid's office in Juba in South Sudan (which is under review but hopefully will be sustained in some form) we are able to work together. They take a leading role in humanitarian aid support and the work of the South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC). This is an ecumenical body made up of the main denominations including Anglicans, Roman Catholics Pentecostals etc and is currently chaired by the ECSS Primate Abp Justin Badi. It needs to be more effective in its relationships with President Salva Kiir's government which is ignoring any real peace initiatives between the rival tribes and parties and particularly the Dinka (Kiir's tribe) and the Nuer people, numerically the first and second tribes in South Sudan. With us, Christian Aid's commitments to the SSCC also include liaising with HMG's FCDO specialists to re-invigorate peace initiatives. President Kiir's health is fading, and he has plans to appoint a relative of his own tribe as his successor, seemingly without consulting his cabinet or government ministers.

Any sort of peace agreement in the conflict in Sudan is even more remote. Just one of many stumbling blocks to any sort of reconciliation is the granting of overflying rights by the Juba government for the delivery of arms from the United Emirates to the RSF rebel forces in western Sudan.

Economic consequences of conflict

The devastating consequences of the terrible conflict in Sudan are showing no real signs of abating. There is a serious risk that Sudan could be divided into two states – East and West. In El Fasher, a city of 300,000 people in southwest Sudan, the rebel forces of the RSF are building a 27-mile-long embankment around the city in a ring nine miles wide slowly strangling the city within. As commentators have said, this medieval act of war could quite possibly facilitate a massacre of the population. The cities of El Obeid and Kadugli are under similar threat, and the latter diocese is faithfully supported by the Bradford on Avon deanery Whilst motions are regularly proposed in the UN Security Council there is no identifiable progress to stop or reduce the violence. The RSF is a remnant of the Janjaweed militia originally supported by the Wagner Group and Russia.

When the fighting broke out in Sudan some three years ago we helped with other partners to evacuate Abp Ezekiel Kondo and his family and staff from a much-destroyed Khartoum and Omdurman to re-establish him in Port Sudan on the Red Sea coast. He operates from there but has also travelled west to the troubled areas including in Darfur where nearly half the population – some 20 million people, are in a state of 'Food Insecurity' – it is the worst humanitarian crisis in the world today but sadly eclipsed by the other ongoing tragedies of Ukraine and Gaza. There is a consensus that peace in Sudan can only be reached if the parties want it and have to engage in it.

In South Sudan, government workers have not been paid for over nine months, caused principally by the significant loss of virtually the only source of revenue from their oil resources which must be transported by pipeline northwards through Sudan to the Red Sea. The northern pipeline has been severely damaged in the fighting in Sudan and the people of both Sudan and South Sudan are suffering terrible deprivations. In addition, South Sudan is carrying the extra burden of hosting thousands of refugees escaping the

fighting in Sudan, some of whom fled South Sudan to Sudan when tribal fighting broke out in 2013 just 17 months after South Sudan's independence.

Bishop Holtam Fund

Over the past five years we have benefited from a gift by a benefactor who named his £10,000 pa. donation after Bishop Nicholas Holtam to support environmental projects and the training of midwives and clinical officers. The provision of solar panels, particularly in schools has also helped us to combine environmental objectives with educational needs. An additional annual grant to the BHF has been agreed for 2025/6

Funding and Financial Management

In one sense our Salisbury–Sudans Partnership is an 'Umbrella Group' supporting the Episcopal Churches and the people in South Sudan and Sudan. It is entirely funded by the generosity of donors from across our Diocese of Salisbury and sometimes beyond, encouraged and sustained by the local initiatives and longstanding friendships many of our deaneries and parishes so faithfully pursue.

We are very grateful indeed for the outstanding support we receive from the Diocesan DBF staff and particularly their accounts team. The business of safely and reliably transferring funds to Sudan and South Sudan is often fraught with difficulties over the integrity of the international banking systems and not the least is the need to continuously keep our own bankers on side and satisfy their regulations. The patience and support of our DBF is commendable.

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