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## Bishop Ricard reports progress in Sudan

**Bishop John H. Ricard, SSJ, traveled to Sudan to meet with the Sudan Catholic Bishops Conference as well as Catholic Relief Services staff. Here, Bishop Ricard shares some reflections from his first days in the capital.**

**KHARTOUM, Sudan (July 24)** —For the first time in almost 20 years, Sudan’s bishops are reunited in Khartoum, having come together to participate in the Sudan Catholic Bishops Conference plenary. This joyous occasion marks a new unity, with the separate north and south conferences merged once again into one.



COURTESY PHOTO BY BILL SCHMITT/CRS

**Catholic Relief Services/North Sudan country representative Mark Snyder shows Bishop Ricard temporary shelters built by CRS for**

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This Sunday on the grounds of St. Matthew's Cathedral, a sense of jubilation and relief prevailed at the open-air Mass and subsequent celebration of music and dance. Around 5,000 people gathered outside the church, expressing an incredible outpouring of affection for the bishops by shaking and kissing their hands. Young dancers and drummers from every major tribe in South Sudan entertained the crowd with music, song, dancing and prayer. The festive mood moved audience members — including nuns, priests and a bishop — to join the dances of their related tribes. This celebration felt like a real turning point, as if people were removing the last restraints of war and feeling free to finally express their faith and joy.

When we met with the bishops the following day, it became clear that the reality in Sudan has changed. Peace has created a whole new set of issues for the conference to address. People returning to the south have rising expectations and are looking to the church and parishes for schools, medical care and more. Anxiety over delivering all that is needed tempers newfound optimism as people realize that rebuilding won't happen overnight — even if people are ready to return home now.

Khartoum has also changed. The quiet, sleepy town I visited with (Catholic Relief Services president) Ken Hackett in 2004 is now a burgeoning capital with plenty of traffic and construction cranes. There is also a greatly increased presence of southerners, especially young southerners taking advantage of Khartoum's growing

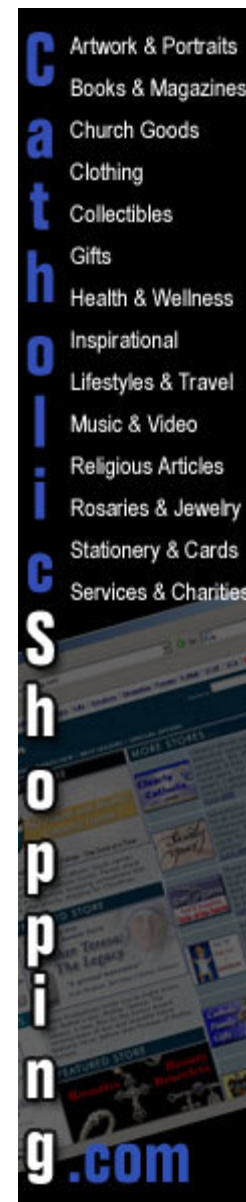
**families recently displaced by the Darfur conflict.**

**CRISIS IN DARFUR**

*This update on the humanitarian crisis in the Darfur region of Sudan is provided by Catholic Relief Services, the overseas development arm of the U.S. Catholic Community.*

**Brief background:** Violence dramatically escalated in February 2003, when two rebel groups attacked a Sudanese government military garrison in North Darfur, complaining the region had been marginalized and was not receiving its share of power and resources. In response, local Arab militia known as janjaweed attacked villages linked to the rebel groups. The result has been a vicious fight that has spilled across the region and over the border into Chad.

**Affected populations:** More than 200,000 people have died in the conflict, with another 2.2 million displaced from their homes. More than two thirds of Darfur's 6 million



employment opportunities.

Today we will move on to Darfur to visit with some officials and tour CRS projects. Our briefings to have noted a relative decrease in terms of violence and insecurity and an improvement in the ability to reach more people than before; nonetheless, most access is by helicopter because roads remain dangerous. We should bear in mind that this conflict is far from solved, and 2 million people are still not able to return safely to their homes.

The Sudanese bishops are deeply concerned for their country, both in regard to Darfur and the challenges of facilitating return to the south. They are working closely together to address common problems and are speaking with a unified voice. This represents a new day and is clearly the result of the long-term commitment of CRS and other (nongovernmental organizations) who stuck by the Sudanese people, walking with them and accompanying them in their struggle.

Peace and hope for the future now exists between the north and south. May it soon reach Darfur.

**EL GENEINA, West Darfur, Sudan( July 26)** —Three years after my first visit, I

people have been affected by the crisis and require emergency relief.

**Political developments:** A peace agreement — the Darfur Peace Agreement — reached in May 2006 between the government of Sudan and a faction of one of the major rebel groups has been largely ignored. A peace process has been reinvigorated, with envoys from the African Union and United Nations in the lead. Last fall, President George W. Bush appointed Andrew Natsios as a special envoy to the region.

**Peacekeeping:** African Union monitors have been stationed in Darfur since June 2004. Currently about 7,000 in number, they lacked a robust mandate to protect civilians. In November 2006, the African Union and U.N. put forth a plan that earned verbal consent by all parties; this June, Sudan agreed to the third and final phase of that plan, a hybrid African Union/U.N. operation of more than 20,000 peacekeepers and military police.

**Humanitarian response:** Aid workers are spread across Darfur to reach affected communities. Lack of security has made the work more dangerous in the past year, as relief workers became targets for attack. More than a dozen aid workers have been killed since the Darfur Peace Agreement was signed.

**Catholic Relief Services:**

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have returned to Darfur. The conflict is now 4 years old and it is far from resolved. But hopefully the tide is turning as a new mood emerges and peace efforts continue. On my last trip, I traveled with Catholic Relief Services president Ken Hackett to the town of Nyala in the state of South Darfur. This time I am in the town of El Geneina in West Darfur, seeing once again the situation on the ground firsthand with staff from CRS.

The emergency response has matured, and it is clear that CRS and other leading agencies are making a difference in people's lives here.

The work is difficult and challenging, especially due to security concerns. Risks are very real and adjustments have to be made daily, which can be very costly and affect the scale of the response. But the overall situation seems to be stabilizing in terms of reaching people in need.

Today we visited Ardamata camp where thousands of people are living just outside of El Geneina. In the last three weeks, CRS erected 750 new shelters for families recently driven from their homes. Agencies are partnering here to create a planned community that mimics village life. People live in very small structures that are very close to each other, but each family's area is clearly defined, and schools and water pumps bring the community together.

We also spent time talking with a local wali, some sheiks and an imam, who represent the civic and religious

The agency continues to reach 150,000 people in West Darfur, providing food, water, sanitation, shelter, support with education and agriculture, and other services.

**How to help:** CRS suggests praying for the people of Darfur, educating yourself and your communities about the situation, becoming an advocate for Sudan and making donations. More information about donating to CRS is available at [http://crs.org/make\\_a\\_gift/](http://crs.org/make_a_gift/) and more information about how to help the people of Darfur is available at <http://sudan.crs.org/help.htm>

authority in the town. They expressed a great deal of gratitude for CRS' work and for the engagement of American Catholics and the American people in responding to the crisis. Ongoing needs are still considerable, however, and will require long-term assistance, such as improving access to clean water, building clinics and continuing to expand education services. But I'm seeing a greater level of cooperation and collaboration between the local government and aid agencies, and there is respect here for the work of CRS and that of other agencies. There is also a recognition of their contribution to this difficult situation rather than troubling indifference or animosity.

I'm sensing a different mood in Sudan. I believe that the governors, the church and the Sudanese people are demonstrating a new sense of confidence in their ability to move toward peace. Sudan is a vast, beautiful country with considerable resources. The Sudanese must resolve the conflict in Darfur in order to move forward in achieving sustainable development.



COURTESY PHOTO BY BILL SCHMITT/CRS

**A group of children greet the bishops in Darfur at a school where CRS has built urgently needed classrooms.**



**Temporary shelters built by CRS for families displaced by the Darfur conflict dot the background, as CRS country representative Mark Snyder, left, and Bishop Ricard, center, walk away from the shelters.**



I hope that American Catholics, who have responded generously to the conflict in Darfur, would continue to provide financial contributions to support ongoing emergency interventions. And I hope that these contributions would be matched by a serious effort on the part of our own State Department and administration in Washington to bring all involved parties together so that these skirmishes and disruption can cease. All Sudanese must be able to live in peace to realize their whole human potential.

Pope Paul VI said in his magnificent encyclical letter "*Populorum Progressio*" ("Development of Peoples") that development brings about peace, and peace is synonymous with development. It is my hope that this happens across Sudan.



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