

Environmental Efforts Consolidated in South Sudan

By Reverend John Chol Daau
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As the people of South Sudan, the newest emerging nation in the world, gear up to celebrate their first day of independence on July 9, 2011, they face numerous challenges. Among the many challenging tasks ahead, the new nation must address the looming hazards that are the result of poor environmental care, conservation, protection, and management. In semi-urban areas of South Sudan on almost every street one cannot miss noticing piles of empty plastic water bottles, soda cans, and other garbage and solid waste rampantly heaped on the roadsides and next to homesteads. This makes it even more dangerous and adds to the poor sanitation that already exists in South Sudan.

Under the theme *Consolidating Environmental Programs in South Sudan*, the Humane Development Council (HDC) held a daylong conference on May 24, 2011, in Juba, South Sudan's capital, to address issues of environmental concern. The conference was held at the South Sudan Hotel, Buluk with 46 participants in attendance. All were drawn from various organizations, institutions, and companies with a commitment to address environmental issues. The participating institutions and organizations were from NGO's (non-government



Mr. Victor Lotome addressing the conference.

organizations), GoSS (Government of South Sudan) ministries, city council, churches, institutions of higher learning, and investment companies.

The Director General of GoSS's Ministry of Environment, Mr. Victor Wurda Lotome, graced the occasion. Other representatives present included the Managing Director of Gemtel Mobile Operators, the New Sudan Insurance Company, and the British Council among other investors. The UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), together with other international and local NGO's also attended.

Opening the conference with prayer and scriptural exhortation, the Anglican priest Reverend John Chol Daau emphasized the Christian religion's point of view, that environmental conservation and protection has been and is still the primary agenda of God as illustrated in the story of creation. He added, "One of the man's principal responsibilities is to care for and protect the environment." The Executive Director of the HDC, Mr. Deng Yuot, firmly emphasized that this was the third time his organization held an environmental conference, an indication that shows solid commitment of the HDC in matters of environment. Director General Mr. Lotome, representing the GoSS Ministry of Environment, acknowledged that the government is committed to stand with organizations and institutions that are involved in matters related to environmental conservation and protection. "We are committed to keep South Sudan clean and green," he said. Mr. Victor firmly remarked, "To keep our environment clean and safe calls for *goodwill* from both the government and individuals!" He strongly cautions, "Poor environment brings deformity, epidemic diseases... [while a] clean environment makes one live longer." The participants solidly stressed that as South Sudan enters into its newest status as an

independent nation, matters of the environment must be of the highest consideration. South Sudan's UNDP representative, Mr. Stuart Crane, also highlights that this is the best time and best opportunity for the people of South Sudan to consider putting in place policies and regulations that will effectively control exports from outside the country.

Dr. Pasquale Moilinga, lecturer at the University of Juba College of Natural Resources and Environment, presented an informative academic paper on the linkage of the environment to natural resources, including biodiversity and wildlife. In his presentation, he outlined factors that contribute to setbacks on efforts to safeguard the environment. Key to his list is the lack of environmental policies and weak law enforcement institutions on matters that have to do with the environment. He also advises, "As our nation grows, environmental issues expand and increase significantly." Many participants and representatives stated that efforts to care for our environment are strained by the behaviors and attitudes of the people. It was pointed out repeatedly that the people of South Sudan must cultivate attitudes and behaviors that are in favor of caring for the environment.



In the presentation of Mr. Nathan Pitia, Director General of GoSS Ministry of Gender and Social Welfare, hygiene and sanitation are issues of major concern. Mr. Pitia warned, "Without concerted action, the lack of sanitation will continue to impact the lives of millions of [vulnerable] and impede progress on development in South Sudan."



According to Mr. Pitia, "Real progress [urgently] requires concerted efforts from all sectors... in order to reduce the high rates of mortality among the children in South Sudan." Mr. Lotome strongly encouraged those who have taken up the commitment on environmental concerns and assured them that the Government of South Sudan will work alongside of them. One of the signs of cooperation is the ongoing work on the drafted environmental policy and laws for safeguarding it currently awaiting approval. At the end of the conference, participants put together recommendations and resolutions as action points in an attempt to guide and consolidate environmental efforts in South Sudan.

Humane Development Council (HDC) is a registered, non-profit and non-partisan indigenous organization, primarily focusing on developmental issues such education, women's empowerment and capacity building in South Sudan. Core to the work of HDC is its advocacy and commitment to raise awareness on environmental issues. HDC is actively involved in programs such as assisting returnees and vulnerable in efforts of reintegration of the returnees. HDC is actively involved in civic HDC has its headquarters in Juba, Central Equatoria State, and has state field offices in Jonglei, Eastern Equatoria, and Warrap states.