



## **AFRICA/SOUTH SUDAN - "We are neither Dinka nor Nuer, but representatives of one church and one body of Christ", write the Christian leaders, denouncing the exploitation of tribalism**

Juba (Agenzia Fides) - There are growing appeals on behalf of Christian church leaders so that peace and reconciliation prevail in South Sudan while the UN and several foreign Countries proceed with evacuating their staff and their citizens from the Country in the throes of a violent clash between rival factions of the armed forces. The attack on the UN base in Akobo, in the east of South Sudan, during which three Indian peacekeepers lost their lives, has accelerated the operations of repatriation of foreigners.

To avoid that the fight between President Salva Kiir (an ethnic Dinka) and former Vice President Riek Machar (a Nuer) precipitates the young state (independent since July 2011) in the spiral of ethnic conflict, several Catholic Bishops and other Christian denominations denounce the manipulation of ethnicity for political purposes. According to reports from the Sudan's Catholic Radio Network, Mgr. Erkulano Lodu Tombe, Bishop of Yei, appealed to soldiers from the local barracks to avoid listening to the voice of some politicians who instill confusion. Mgr. Elias Taban, Bishop of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Yei, said that "some South Sudanese traitors intend to promote tribalism to leave the country underdeveloped".

Christian religious leaders have also written a joint letter. Describing themselves as "native members from the Dinka and Nuer communities", the Bishops and all the clergy, say "they do not identify themselves as representatives of tribes or denominations (religious) but as leaders and representatives of the Church and the Body of Christ".

Expressing sadness concerning the violence in Juba and in Jonglei State, the church leaders "condemn and correct the media statements and reports that refer to the violence as conflict between the Dinka and Nuer tribes.

Whatever has happened should not be referred to as ethnic conflict. Instead, these are political differences among the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) Party, and the political leaders of the Republic of South Sudan".

Religious leaders denounced the incidents of killing based on their ethnic affiliation and appealed to politicians to stop inciting violence and to work instead for peace and reconciliation. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 20/12/2013)