
Bishop Carlassare (Rumbek): "I dream of a South Sudan without conflict and violence".

The Ordination ceremony in the diocese, planned for May 23rd, has been deferred until after Monsignor Christian Carlassare, Bishop of Rumbek in South Sudan shot in the legs in an ambush, recovers "in body and spirit, from the trauma and until the necessary steps have been taken to permit my return to Rumbek": "Namely, the continuance of criminal investigation and identification of the offenders, the ensuing judgment and guarantees that I will be safe when I go there and that no other such attack will take place", Monsignor Carlassare told SIR on Tuesday, one week after the attack by two gunmen who stormed the curia in Rumbek in the middle of the night. After having been shot and wounded in both legs the bishop found a mobile phone belonging to the assailants, which allowed investigators to retrace their previous communications. Among the 24 people arrested were also some priests and collaborators of the diocese. "I have not been briefed on the investigation," said the Comboni bishop, "but I learned that more people allegedly involved or supporting the attack have been arrested. I reckon that those who carried out the crimes and those who sent them are few. I hope this will not cause confusion in the investigations. I leave it to the government to conduct its own investigations and only then, based on the conclusions, I will also be able to draw conclusions." Monsignor Carlassare, 43, born in Schio, originally from Piovene Rocchette (diocese of Padua, Italy), is the youngest bishop in the world. He was appointed bishop by Pope Francis on March 8 and had arrived some ten days earlier in Rumbek, a diocese marked by tense relations between the Dinka (majority) and Nuer ethnic groups, whose bishopric fell vacant after the death of Comboni bishop Cesare Mazzolari ten years ago. Monsignor Carlassare is now being treated in hospital in Nairobi, where he underwent two more surgeries on his legs and might also be needing a skin transplant: "I am still in bed, I cannot move or put weight on my legs, everything will depend on the physical therapy. It will take at least a month or a month and a half for my muscle cells to regenerate, allowing me to return to walking normally."



Immagine non disponibile

[I certainly want to return to Rumbek, my commitment remains unaltered. When I learned I had been appointed bishop of Rumbek I was aware that it was a problematic diocese because the see had been vacant for ten years. When I accepted, I knew I was headed for a difficult situation with a need for clarity. I was aware that there had been various problems in the past, including violent incidents against priests and nuns. Once I arrived in Rumbek my concern was to cooperate with everyone, to identify the good intentions and the shortcomings. Obviously no one is completely evil, so I sought to work with everyone, including those with a record of disturbing allegations or reports. In the first ten days I was welcomed by everyone, I noticed good intentions on everyone's part. I knew I could](#)

completely trust some of the people I worked with. Others I had yet to understand. Certainly

I would never have expected this kind of response after ten days, utterly uncalled for and out of proportion.

You issued numerous appeals for forgiveness and reconciliation: do you think they will facilitate a process that is still fraught with obstacles? Many people have approached me with great respect, praising the intention behind my call for forgiveness. However, some have said that justice is needed more than forgiveness. I agree, because when a crime is committed, that harm must first be repaired and a fair decision must help the offender(s) to convert, change and acknowledge their wrongdoing.

It is not a matter of blanket forgiveness, as if nothing had ever happened.

There must be a willingness to bear responsibility for the crimes committed. However, in the face of all the evil in the world, only forgiveness offers hope for the future. This is something I firmly believe in: while demanding justice and lawful procedures, there is also a personal need for forgiveness. This doesn't mean reversing things to how they were before. Hearts must be healed by forgiveness. Forgiveness is first and foremost an inner desire. But I also think that that same need can be felt by the offender(s), when they acknowledge their guilt and want to change because they feel loved. This is a new experience in South Sudan. I believe that

those who committed this deed have a strong need to feel loved, despite what they have done.

Have you been informed of any new developments in the investigation? I don't know much about the ongoing investigation because it is obviously confidential. All I know is that it began with the mobile phone dropped by the two attackers, which I saw and gave to the priest who came to help me. That led to the first arrests of people who had been in touch with them during the days leading up to the attack. A total of 24 people had been identified earlier, but I learned that more people allegedly involved or supporting the attack have also been arrested. I reckon that those who carried out the crimes and those who sent them are few. I hope this will not cause confusion in the investigations. I leave it to the government to conduct its own investigations and only then, based on the conclusions, I will draw the necessary conclusions myself.

The Pope has publicly voiced his support, how did it make you feel? Also the Church of South Sudan released a statement.

I was moved by the Pope's support. He has so much weighing on his shoulders and I would never have wanted to burden him with this. I spoke with the bishops of South Sudan and the nuncio in Kenya, who also serves South Sudan, who conveyed the greetings of Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, Secretary for Relations with States, scheduled to ordain me. We must obviously all be co-responsible and carry the weight of the Church together. I recognise the Pope as a great apostle, teacher and father and I follow him in his footsteps. I feel the support of the Church, because I am Church and I want to be the support that people need to see. All I need is to incarnate that reality that others want to see in the Church: a Church that is true Church, a disciple, a Church that pays the price. A Church close to the poor, that suffers and redeems. I received the sympathy of so many people, men and women of faith, who prayed for me and gave me great courage. Being Christian is not about words, being Christian means having converted to a good and different life. **Now that the initial shock has somewhat subsided, what is your appeal to the people of Rumbek, to the**

Sudanese people? My appeal to the people of Rumbek and to all Sudanese people is to dream big and put aside all the anger, discontent and dissatisfaction caused by the conflicts and by an endless wave of violence that prevents us from dreaming of a different world, this is the world where the strongest is always the winner, where in order to obtain what you deserve you have to fight. This is not South Sudan, it is not the Nuer, it is not Dinka, no tribe does this. It is necessary to rediscover the noble African values of the family, the values of solidarity, communion and peace, which existed before the violent events of the last 50 years of conflict. *I dream of a Dinka culture and a Nuer culture freed from all those elements of violence, fostering a life of togetherness and beauty, where everyone is equal and can enjoy resources in equality.* **How could the international community help South Sudan?** My invitation to the international community is to view Africa through new and different lenses. I would like them to recognise Africa's noble values and to listen to the African people's requests to have access to resources, to be given the possibility to develop to their full potential. Italy often has a negative attitude that does not do it justice, whereas Africa is beautiful, flourishing, growing and has already surpassed us in terms of civilisation. There are many beautiful things that can be brought to light, rather than the negative aspects that we are used to emphasising. If Africa succeeds in overcoming its own problems of ungovernability and violence, it will have the potential to save the world in many respects: it has the potential to renew the world, to propose renewed spirituality, new forms of economic life, solidarity and communion.

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