

## **PRE-CONFERENCE REFLECTION PAPER NONVIOLENCE CONFERENCE ROME**

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Some of my friends chose to pursue a military career. They shared their experiences and dilemmas during their peacekeeping missions in Cambodia and former Yugoslavia. War changed into 'armed conflict and soldiers didn't only fight, they 'intervened' as "peace soldiers".

The difficulty of the combination of these terms led me to write my thesis on the theory of just war and humanitarian military interventions. The research led me to the Dutch peace movement where I continued doing research on military ethics.

Some years later I returned to the peace movement and got engaged in work in Sudan. In this country, a so-called liberation struggle was ongoing. A liberation struggle that seemed legitimate taking the context into account. It was not difficult to understand why people in South Sudan or from South Sudanese descent decided the only way to deal with oppression was through armed struggle. However, the war had enormous human cost. Famine, child soldiers, trauma, under development.....

In South Sudan I was privileged to work with church leaders that worked tirelessly to improve the situation of their people despite the extremely difficult circumstances. In my experience, it were the South Sudanese led processes that turned out to be more sustainable than the ones initiated by outsiders like the UN mission in South Sudan. However, they were often instrumental in bringing warring parties together but were not able to realise a fundamental change in the way the people were being governed (if this was their ambition at all in the ongoing context of civil war)

As South Sudan became an independent country, my own focus was redirected to the people of Sudan, especially those living in the Nuba mountains and Blue Nile where just before the independence of South Sudan the war reignited between the government of Sudan and the SPLM-North. Again, the government of Sudan resorted to using violent force on its own people as it already continued doing in the western province of Darfur. Almost daily bombardments and military offensives targeting civilians again made me understand why people would resort to force. But this time I was wondering to what extent this kind of war or liberation struggle was going to help them reach their stated goals.

And of course there were people living in Sudan that were not subject of military assaults but did have to cope with a very repressive regime. They also want to see a political change in their country. This was the moment I started looking into the thinking and possibilities of non violent action.

While working with Sudanese civil society and the Sudanese churches, it became clear to me that there is not enough knowledge of the broad spectre and best practices available within the circles of people that are confronted with war and oppression on a daily basis.

This said, I feel the practice, knowledge and thinking around non violent action provide for an addition to the theory of Just war in those case where the current frame of reference of international law is not sufficient. The armed conflicts in Sudan are a point in case, they are not wars in the traditional sense and therefore it is difficult to assess and judge the actions made and needed.