

By God's grace, it would appear that the culminative effect of many years of intensive prayer, worldwide publicity, international pressure, and missionary partnerships with the courageous persecuted Christians in Sudan are finally bearing fruit.

For most of its independence, Sudan has suffered from successive oppressive governments, violent revolutions, coup d'etats and civil war. Since being granted independence in 1956, the increasingly oppressive Arab governments have discriminated against and waged war against the Christian Black South. The government of Sudan has bombed Christian schools, hospitals and churches, burned crops and poisoned wells. The long-suffering Christian Blacks of Southern Sudan have endured slave raids, scorched earth campaigns, amputations and even crucifixions.

For many years it seemed that the international community and the mass media were blind to the decades of Jihad in Africa's largest country, Sudan. For some reason, most of the war correspondents never covered the longest war of the 20th Century, in Sudan. As the beleaguered Christians in Southern Sudan explained to me in 1995: "We are a hidden people, fighting a forgotten war."

Since my first mission trip to Sudan, I have personally, on over 1000 radio and TV programmes and probably as many public meetings, on four continents, exposed the horrific atrocities of the Islamic government and presented the inspiring stories of Christian faith under fire in Sudan. In 1996, my book, *Faith Under Fire In Sudan*, was published and soon had to be updated and expanded, with the new edition being published in 1998. Both these books sold well. Frontline Fellowship then helped Jeremiah Films produce the video documentaries: *Sudan: the Hidden Holocaust* (2000) and *Terrorism and Persecution* (2001) which alerted many millions more people to the plight of Christians suffering under the relentless Islamic Jihad in Sudan.

Over the last nine years, Frontline Fellowship has taken in many journalists, photographers, missionaries and church leaders to introduce them to the incredible courage of the tenacious Sudanese Christians — an island of Christianity in a sea of Islam.

Numerous dedicated Christians have invested sacrificially in Sudan, establishing schools, hospitals, colleges, helping to rebuild



bombed churches, delivering food to starving villagers whose crops had been burned and whose livestock had been looted by government forces. On occasions we came under artillery and aerial bombardments during church services. Extraordinary efforts were undertaken to publicise the perilous plight of the persecuted Christians in Sudan, and to mobilise international pressure against the persecutors.

By God's grace, all of this prayer, publicity, pressure and partnership began to turn the tide. In addition, the US war against terrorism following the Al Qaeda terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, have also had the unexpected side effect of hastening a cease fire and peace negotiations in Sudan.

The National Islamic Front (NIF) government of Sudan (which came to power through a military coup in 1989, under Lieutenant General Omar Hassan Ahmed Al-Bashir) was a radical Islamacist government which hosted and sponsored a wide variety of terrorist groups, including Al Qaeda of Osama Bin Laden. The NIF government of Sudan was one of the very few governments that recognised the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. The Sudan government also maintained close and friendly relations with Saddam Hussain's regime in Iraq.

When the Americans reacted to the terrorist assaults on the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Washington by overthrowing the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, the NIF government in Sudan began seriously talking about a cease fire with the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA). With the defeat of Saddam Hussain's forces, the fragile cease-fire in Sudan began to solidify into more serious peace talks.

The talk in Southern Sudan by both Church and SPLM leaders during 2004 had been that: should President Bush lose the November 2004 US presidential elections, the government of Sudan would go back to war and continue bombing the South. However, it was generally believed, by both Muslims and Christians, that should President Bush win the US elections, then the government of Sudan would have no choice but to abandon the war and finalise the peace. Many Christians in the bush in Sudan were holding regular prayer meetings for a Bush victory in America!

Now, with President George Bush re-elected for a second term in the US, the government of Sudan dare not risk a new campaign of bombing schools, hospitals and churches in Southern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains. The very real possibility that they could be overthrown — as their friends in Afghanistan and Iraq were — convinced Al-Bashir's government that, out of political survival, they must make peace with the Black South.

It would therefore appear that, as a result of the prayer, publicity, pressure, partnerships and presidential elections peace is finally coming to Sudan! The longest war, in the largest country in Africa, is — for all intents and purposes — over. Who would have thought that the final battles in Africa's longest war would have been fought in Afganistan and Iraq by American soldiers and in the US presidential elections by American voters!

In 2005, it will have been a half-century since the first shots were fired in this colossal conflict. But now the guns are silent. It has been over eighteen months since Christians in Southern Sudan endured aerial bombardments, artillery barrages or scorched earth campaigns. Refugees are returning, churches are being rebuilt, homes are being constructed, crops are being planted and herds are once more grazing — where for decades Arab forces had waged a scorched earth campaign seeking to destroy everything necessary to sustain life.

We praise God that the largest team Frontline has ever fielded in Sudan, twelve missionaries and volunteers, have all safely returned. This team has delivered thousands of Bibles and Christian school textbooks, conducted numerous discipleship training courses and assisted pastors and teachers in establishing primary schools. We are also helping re-establish a Bible college to train pastors in Southern Sudan.

Over the last nine years Frontline Fellowship has, by God's grace, delivered and distributed over 250 000 Bibles and Christian books, in 22 languages, in 13 regions of Sudan. We've also had the opportunity to deliver an ambulance, tons of medicines, food and agricultural tools and seed to some of the most desperately needy Christians suffering from some of the worst persecution in the world.

To each of you who have helped to make this possible, we are so very grateful for all your prayers, encouragement and practical support. May the Lord continue to abundantly bless and reward you for your thoughtfulness, generosity and sacrifice.

Although peace seems to be returning to Southern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains, we are aware that a separate conflict is raging in the Darfur province of Western Sudan. This is a Muslim - on - Muslim conflict where Arab Muslim militias are attacking Black Muslim tribesmen. As far as we know, no Christians are involved in that conflict or province. It is extraordinary that the same media and governments which failed to pay much attention to the almost five decades of relentless government persecution of Black Christians in Southern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains, have showed such intense interest in this much smaller scale, lower intensity, recent conflict in Darfur.

Now that peace is returning to Southern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains, we dare not diminish our efforts in leadership training, literature distribution and love in action. We need to continue to help train pastors, evangelists, teachers and nurses and help equip them with what they need to rebuild their country from the ruins of decades of war and persecution. Steve Evers, the Director of In Touch Mission International, who has just returned from Sudan wrote this: "Because of the impact of Frontline Fellowship and its supporters for all these years in Southern Sudan, the Church has been enabled to have a dynamic Christian impact on the minds of the new leadership of Southern Sudan. This Christian influence and the invaluable training of the military's chaplains have helped transition the SPLA/M from their initial communist ideology to being on the doorstep, in many instances, of implementing Church recommended standards for government. In light of this, we need, now even more than ever, to support the positive, Church affected, momentum that was so beneficial through the civil war which has brought us to the place where a new country is formulating their principles from here on out and are listening to what the Church has to offer."

