



# PCOSS/S EDUCATION NEWS

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SUDAN (PCOSS/S) EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

First Edition  
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## From the Editor

Although we are thankful to all our teachers for their hard work and dedication to educating our communities, you have distinguished one from each of the PCOSS schools whom you feel is a role model within this noble profession. You based your 2018 Teacher of the Year selection upon the following criteria:

- ◆ Loves teaching, does lesson preparations, and encourages learners of all abilities
- ◆ Supports good working relationships with learners, colleagues, and the parent community
- ◆ Does not absent him/herself from classes and staff meetings
- ◆ Promotes and demonstrates equality and peace
- ◆ Actively participates in his/her PCOSS congregation
- ◆ Enjoys learning new things

We are happy to dedicate a portion of this edition and the next one to these very deserving servants. Thank you, Teachers of the Year, for your service.

Also, in this edition, we look at one growing challenge in the teaching and learning process as more children who were once labelled “child soldiers” are returning to school. As educators and nurturers, we embrace them as we believe that every child has a right to be carefree, live within a peaceful society and receive a good education.

We will hear from two headteachers who have welcomed them into the classroom, a mentor who is helping them to reintegrate into the community, a guardian who is reclaiming his relative from soldiering, the faith community who prays for total peace, and former child soldiers themselves who have laid down the AK-47 in hopes that “education is the most powerful weapon...to change the world” (Nelson Mandela).

**They will stop using their weapons for war. They will hammer their swords into plows and use their spears to make tools for harvesting. All fighting between nations will end. They will never again train for war. Isaiah 2:4**

**When asked, “Who is a child soldier?” simply answer, “My child!” for every child belongs to each of us.**



## The Impact of Children as Soldiers

Research shows that children in South Sudan as young as eight are at risk of being a child soldier. In fact, this age group makes up a substantial number of the 300,000 children who are not in school but serving — in some capacity somewhere around the globe — as soldiers. Even more startling is that fact that 40% of the population of child soldiers worldwide is the girlchild (AnswersAfrica.com).

Whether children are recruited by force or “voluntarily” to escape the harsh realities of their daily life, the impact on them, their families and communities, and the country at large is devastating. In addressing this issue facing us today, the education department is

(Continued on page 2)

## Child Soldier: Poetry

I was born into so much love, discipline and happiness. Praised by my mother and father, taught values and cultural ethics that I can abide by so that society can acknowledge my parents’ devotion to their child. I am a child, not a soldier.

Conflicts and misunderstandings ruined the harmony in my community, and I was forced to become a soldier before my time. Not knowing the life within the army, I was turned into a soldier forced to kill in order to protect myself and survive. But I never dreamt that at one point my childhood would be swept away, meeting maturity at a tender age. I am a child, not a soldier.

Now my childhood is like a faded memory. I always wanted to change my ways but the bloodshed and the images of those lives I took away haunt me, and I cannot force the guilt away into an unspoken proverb. Recognized, stigmatized and ostracized as a child soldier because I fought a war that didn’t belong to me or my agemates. I am a child, not a soldier.

**“Childhood should be carefree, playing in the sun; not living a nightmare in the darkness of the soul.”** Dave Pelzer

My soul has been weaponized and the rules of it changed my tranquil nature. I began to embrace the title of soldier because I was one; not the doctor, nurse, teacher, or someone other that could honor my parents and bring smiles to their faces. The critical situation changed the possibilities. All I can say is that I am a child, not a soldier.

Through your embracing welcome and an understanding smile, I am

(Continued on page 3)

### Former Child Soldiers in the Classroom

Observation is a key tool in understanding the teachers and children under one's care. It was through this method that I came to know that several of the youngsters enrolled in my school had been a few of the estimated 16,000 currently or recently serving as soldiers (UNICEF). Their behavior and constant talk of guns were sure indicators that they had not had the opportunity to be carefree children. Taking them aside, I enquired of their short history and, yes, they had served in conflicts but were trying to reintegrated into the community.

It then became my moral, civic and professional duty to help them in this process. I began to teach them how to relate to and communicate with other children, either in the class or out-of-school. I focused on the whole person beyond just teaching them speaking, reading and basic new skills. My relationship with each of them was cultivated so that they could feel that they had someone who would listen to them, encourage their efforts, and correct their errors. I started walking with them as my friends so that they would not think that they are isolated from others. This is important because when you leave them it is so easy for them to go back to the military and ways that they are familiar with. I showed them that I loved them and considered them as members of my family. Gradually, they began to come back to "normal," make friends, live a new life, and have faith in God.

The challenges have not all been overcome. Sometimes it is difficult to understand their reasoning and it does take a lot of patience. It is not easy to teach former child soldiers because there is so much trauma that is preventing them from concentrating on lessons and believing that life has other options, especially for themselves. Correcting them when they are wrong requires positive and soft techniques.

I think that there is a bit of fear that others will find out their history and they will be stigmatized or blamed. Because their mind is still associated to the military, they are always fighting, for they see this as the only way to solve problems in life. As a headteacher, though, I cannot give up.

(David Ngiro Yangkon, Headteacher at Akatgol Presbyterian Church Nursery and Primary School)

(Continued from page 1): *The Impact of Children as Soldiers*

working alongside the PCOSS Women Work Department and others to help these children tell their stories, get the love, care and understanding to become "normal" and lessen the continuing trauma carried within the heart.

During a gathering held last year, the women's group also identified other ways in which child soldiering is adversely impacting all. These include the child's embrace of violence as a tool to solve life's problems, another generation deprived of the skills and information needed to navigate the future, sexually-abused and HIV infected youth and the spread of these to others, broken and destroyed families, continuing conflict, greater lack of trust, reduction of the overall population, inability of families and communities to accept returned child soldiers, loss of hopes and dreams that fuel development and progress, and continued cycles of abuse at all levels.

**"...depression, anxiety. (Child soldiers) have intrusive thoughts that come back. That can be triggered by something happening, but of which they have no control. That can affect their functionality"**  
MSF

### Helping the Former Child Soldier

In *Healing the Wounds of Trauma: How the Church Can Help* the authors write, "Any child who is exposed to fighting, killing, and seeing others killed will suffer trauma and will not develop properly as an adult without help." How do we, as educators, respond without causing further damage? According to the writers, help must be offered at all levels.

The first concern is the child. He/she needs to return to his/her family. Because this may not be possible because of the family's fear or hatred of them, help from agencies that deal with the reintegration of child soldiers must be sought on the child's behalf.

The child's experiences, fears and challenges must be heard. Therefore, providing opportunities for them to tell their story through dance, poetry, storytelling, drama, handicraft, and drawing are needed.

Like every human being, knowing that someone loves them is vital to continued development. Understanding, too, that God forgives them of the bad things they have done when they apologize is vital.

The second level is that of helping the parents, community, school and church to understand their pain and that of the former child soldier and the need for encouragement and reconciliation of all.

**"The dignity of children must be respected."**  
Pope Francis

### **We Are Those Children**

Two handsome boys are now in school; each trying to change their path in life by putting soldiering behind them. One now dreams of being a pilot and the other a surgeon after spending more than seven combined years in military life. They are still too young to vote or obtain a driving license and yet, their souls carry experiences that their agetmates in other places and time periods could never imagine.

James and John (not their real names) became soldiers for different reasons: one to defend himself against the physical abuses of war and the other to eat after he became an orphan. James explains that it is not even a matter of refusing to serve as a soldier but one of underage - as was his case. He looked away as he spoke of fighting people he did not know and knowing that he might lose his life. For John, being sent on a mission meant carrying heavy military supplies on his head or back and thinking that it would never end. He says that he wanted to escape but there was no chance to do so.

Both like school and are appreciative of this new opportunity. Life, however, is still not easy. Making the adjustment from one way of life to another is hard and being in a town as opposed to the village offer other challenges.

Another thing James wants to do is to help his family and to help all parents know what is good and bad in life. John had wanted to go to school so that he could help his orphaned siblings and now he thinks that he can. With schooling, they “can get good things in life.” When asked for one word to differentiate their past and present, their responses were “bad/better” and “worse/changed” respectively. John sums up his feelings with these words, “If I compare life of days gone, there is change. It is completely different. In the morning, I had to work, go find food. Now, I get good sleep and just come to school. Life is still hard but so better.”

(James and John live with caring relatives and in a community that has accepted them as valuable members.)

### **A Parent So Worried**

I was so worried; worried because he had been sent on a mission and there was the possibility of him being killed. Killed - at a very young age, still a child. He was young. He joined because he was alone. His mother had passed away. He joined so as to eat. There was no communication during his years as a child soldier. It was confirmed, however, that he was with the military.

Now, he is in school. I brought him here so that he can go to school. I know that education can help him in life.

I want the best for him although a new life is not always easy. I know that I cannot force him to do things or beat him. It will only bring back those memories of the past.

He was “liberated” by an NGO after four years of military life. I am glad that he is safe and alive. (The guardian of a former child soldier.)

### **Being Responsive to the Former Child Soldier**

The former child soldier finds it difficult to stay together with others and often shies away from his peers. To help him in developing relationships with others, he must be encouraged. You can do this by role modeling interpersonal skills and polite ways of speaking with others. In the classroom, small and large group work offers opportunities to develop these skills and outdoor activities such as sports can offer interactive opportunities that help the child to feel a part of things. In either case, it is important to remember to be gentle and polite to the child because in his mind, he is still remembering his past life. Reminding him that the past is gone and this is a new life helps to refocus his thinking to positive things.

In school, home, community or any other place where the child is, it is forbidden to beat or use corporal punishment, even if the child has committed a serious wrongdoing. Beating becomes a problem to the child and will not yield any positive change in attitude, behavior or thinking. It will simply be seen as a way to solve problems, stir up bad memories, provoke anger, and deepen the already experienced trauma. As responsible persons do not seek to punish but counsel and direct in a positive manner. Help him to understand that the focus is on bettering himself, becoming a productive member of society, fulfilling hopes and dreams, and living in harmony with others. Through this counselling, he can see that his life will be different from the days when he was in wartime. (Simon Ngathio, Headteacher at Jaborona IDP Nursery and Primary School)

*(Continued from page 1): The Child Soldier: Poetry*

transformed. I am trying to regain the name “child” and shake off that of “soldier”. I am trying to breathe whole again and spend a moment in just feeling free; not lowering my head in shame in front of society. I am liberated and proud to be a child again and this brokenness I have felt is slowly mending. For I am a child, not a soldier.

(Christine Rachu serves as a mentor to the youth in her community.)

**“The test of a good teacher is not how many questions he can ask his pupils that they will answer readily, but how many questions he inspires them to ask him which he finds it hard to answer.”** *Alice Wellington Rollins*

**“The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires.”** *William Arthur Ward*

## PCOSS 2018 Teachers of the Year

- \* **Kuju Marchelo Ngolezia - Jaborona IDP**
- \* **Awol Deng Makuach - Good Shepherd, South Nyakuron**
- \* **Gatwech Tut Char - Good Shepherd, Mangaten**
- \* **Omong John Ukar - Living Hope, Aweil**
- \* **James Lam Riak Gai - Good Shepherd, POC 3**
- \* **Andrew Bangath - Presbyterian Education Complex of Pochalla**
- \* **Susan Juma Luka - Good Shepherd, Kasire II**
- \* **Kannan Lilcho - Akatgol**
- \* **John Wiyual Banguot - Center 1 Adult School**
- \* **Simon Bhan Joack - Jerusalem Center**
- \* **Simon Chan Luak - Jordan Preschool**
- \* **John Wiyual Yiech - Nguenyiel Preschool**
- \* **Simon Gatwech Thoan – Mat Preschool**
- \* **Reath Biel Riek – Dhorkhotni Adult School**
- \* **Simon Koang Reath - Center 1 Preschool, Kule 2**
- \* **Khor Majiok Tongyik - Center 1 Adult School, Kule 2**
- \* **James Tut Kuach - Parish 1 Free School**
- \* **Christina Eduard Amum - Okuich Palang**
- \* **Yohanis Kun Tut - Whiteland**
- \* **Elizabeth Koch - Center 1 Preschool, Kule**
- \* **John Gatkuoth Tut - Dhorkotni Preschool**
- \* **Peter Chan Pal - Tierkidi Camp Preschool**
- \* **Simon Dep Bichiok - A1 School, Kule 1**
- \* **Tut Rambang Like Deng - Parish 3 Free School**
- \* **Peter Ter Gam Thor - New Camp Free School**
- \* **James Riek Chuol Bukjiok - Pulpam Adult Ed**
- \* **Thomas Tut Diop - Parish 1 Free School**
- \* **Peter Pal Kuem Liep - Dengjock Free School**

**“When the student is ready, the teacher will appear.”**

*African Proverb*

Mr. Peter Mama Oleyo and Mr. Stephen Gai Choat were selected as PCOSS 2018 Outstanding Teachers and featured in the last edition of the *PCOSS/S Education News*. They are congratulated for being exceptional educators and role models.

**“A good teacher knows how to teach the standards. A great teacher knows how to teach her students. An outstanding teacher knows how to teach both.”**

A farewell to Mr. Simon Kollen Dapu Logileng, a dedicated teacher and former head teacher at Jaborona IDP Presbyterian Nursery & Primary School, Kator Payam and SSEPP scholarship recipient to YTTC and STTC. He contributed much to the school community and his presence is missed. May he rest in peace. Prayers are requested for the family, friends and school community that mourn this loss.



Left & Right: It has been a long journey for the first batch of SSEPP scholarship recipients after beginning their studies at the Yei Teacher Training College in 2014. Due to the country's conflict, the college closed and two were only recently able to complete their studies at the Solidarity Teacher Training College in Yambio. Left: STTC Graduate Samuel Balentino Amala Loturu ponders his call to the ministry of education. Right: Michael Christopher Gordon Kenyi (First Row Far Right) is all smiles alongside his classmates during graduation.



Far Left: New classrooms and office space for Good Shepherd, Kasire II. Left: Headteachers and their deputies network to share challenges, seek solutions, and celebrate victories.



Left, Above & Right: Teacher Training and Parents Council Trainings in Renk. Teacher Training in Renk was held collaboratively with the Muhaba Center.



Left: Akatgol IDP Primary School parents listening intently because education is important to them, their children and the entire community.

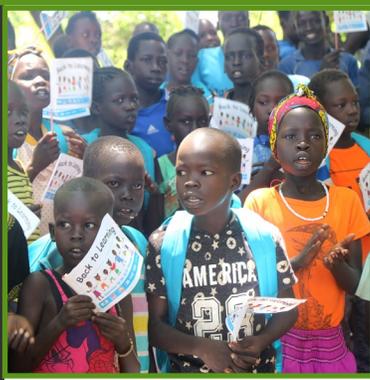


Above Left: A very brave and determined girl (front row left side) studies in the midst of all boys at Kondako Presbyterian School in Pibor. The Parents Council is mobilizing for greater girlchild enrolment. Above Right: Teachers and learners share a moment together.

**EDUCATION IS WHAT SURVIVES WHEN WHAT HAS BEEN LEARNED HAS BEEN FORGOTTEN. B.F. SKINNER**



Above: A few school supplies to promote teaching & learning from partners in education.



Above & Left: PC(USA) Visitors in partnership with the PCOSS and PCOSS education ministry visited schools in May. The Jaborona, Akatgol, Kasire II and PECP school communities welcomed them with songs, food, hopes and dreams, prayers and overall fellowship. During the visit to the Jaborona IDP Primary School, Rev. Debbie Braaksma presented a PCOSS Outstanding Teacher Award to Mr. Peter Mama Oleyo as his colleagues cheered him on. Mr. Oleyo, a graduate of Yei's Reconcile Peace Institute was a student of Rev. Braaksma during her tenure as director. The group began their visit in South Sudan with the PCOSS Moderator, General Assembly staff and department heads. The visiting group included four pastors, one seminarian and two congregational missions committee members.

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