



# SUDAN DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION

Breaking the cycle of poverty through community based development



SUDEF Newsletter - The children of Kalthok, Southern Sudan

September 2010 Volume IV

## Sudan Development Foundation asks you to join us in calling for a fair and timely election on the upcoming Referendum regarding Southern Sudan's independence this January 9, 2011

Sudan Development Foundation would like to encourage our friends to ask their representatives to support a fair and timely election on the upcoming referendum this



January 9, 2011. Please consider writing an email or letter to your Congressional representatives asking them to make sure the United States government brings pressure to bear on

the government of Sudan to ensure a fair election. Please urge your senator or representative to support the outcome of the referendum based on the people's free choice. The most important step in the implementation of the CPA is the timeliness and fairness for voting on the referendum that gives the people in the South the opportunity to decide whether to become independent from the North. Please take action now.

For more information on the upcoming referendum you can friend *Southern Sudanese for Referendum January 2011* on FACEBOOK or visit *New Nation Institute - Get Ready for Southern Sudan Referendum in 2011's* website: <http://www.grssr.org/index.html>

We are currently finalizing plans for Abraham to travel to South Carolina to speak at Clemson University and possibly several other area churches and schools to tell

his story and share with them the work SUDEF is doing and what the future can hold for Southern Sudan.

If you know of a local community group, religious institution, school or college interested in having Abraham come and speak please contact us at [info@sudef.org](mailto:info@sudef.org) and we will be happy to arrange that.

SUDEF's presentation of the film *Rebuilding Hope* at the Essex Cinema this past summer was well received. The following is Abraham's personal reaction to watching the film *Rebuilding Hope*.



Abraham Awolich's mother and sisters

*When we showed the film Rebuilding Hope at the Essex Cinema and the film was over many people could not move out of their seats because they were so weighed down by emotions. To help people process what they had just seen, I*

*stood up to explain by personal connection to the film such as my experience when I first reunited with my family in March 2006. The reality is that mine, like the stories told in Rebuilding Hope, are true stories that tell of a deep human connection that defies time and space.*

*I struggle to make up my mind which part of my journey is more emotional, the day I fled my village and lost touch with my family or the day when I reunited with my family after almost 20 years, in 2006. I happen to believe that my reunion*

*with my family was the most emotional moment in my life. This is so because I had been thinking about them and that day for nearly twenty years and I had created different scenarios in my mind about how I would react when this day would finally come.*

*I was always hopeful that one day I would get back to my village and I would be able to see my family (my parents, brothers and sisters, friends and relatives). Realistically however, I had to prepare my brain for the worst-case scenario and I had to think about what I would do if I did not get to find anyone in my family alive. These were deep emotional questions so many of us had to deal with for nearly two decades.*

*On top of these familial thoughts, we had to deal with death threats ourselves. We lost many friends during our journey as refugees and there were times when we had to struggle for months with questions about death. This is difficult because in the Dinka tradition, and I believe it true is for the entire human society, children are protected from seeing death or dead people. Having to journey out alone, we lost this childhood shield from death, as we had to bury many of our friends. At night, when we are alone and thinking, each of us had to struggle with answering questions about death in his/her mind and heart. I questioned myself on many occasions. Questions like: Am I going to die? Is it going to be my turn to die soon? What would happen to me if I die? Would I be able to see my family? Who is going to play with me if I die? Is it going to be painful when I die? What is going to kill me...a gun or a disease? When will I die? Could I avoid death? Why do people have to die? What wrong did I do to deserve death? Did my friends do something wrong and is that why they died?*

*These questions of course reflected the fact that we did not understand death and we worried mostly about modest things that our brain capacity permitted us to comprehend at that time. We did not have a mechanism as a group to deal with this so each of us had to deal with this by himself. It was helpful of course to have everyone in the same situation because we could compare ourselves with each other. Having nurtured these thoughts in our minds over many years the last test was to actually go through the experience of either a reunion with our family or going on a reunion trip only to find no one in your family survived. Both cases of course are deeply touching and they both achieve something important, closure. Once you go through either case, you can start to rest your mind and begin to store these thoughts deep in the bottom of your consciousness.*

*Nonetheless, I personally had experience with death much earlier than some of my colleagues. When I was six years old, two years before I took my long refugee life journey.*

*It was around 10 PM in July or August 1986 or 1987 when militias attacked Kalthok town killing over twenty people including six SPLA soldiers. The militias basically almost*

*killed me and my entire family because they actually came right to our gate and we overheard them debating whether to attack our village or go to Kalthok town where they could kill many people and cause maximum damage. Fortunately for us, they decided to attack the town instead of our village, which would have begun with killing my family. When they attacked Kalthok town it was nighttime and people were afraid to go out at night to check on what was happening. The following morning however, my mom and many people in the surrounding villages converged in Kalthok to investigate the attack. Kalthok is about three to four miles south of my village.*

*I was warned of course not to go anywhere near Kalthok town, but I was curious to know what had happened. As stubborn a kid as I was and because I knew the area very well I disobeyed my mom and took the back road to the town running as fast as I could. I was the first on the scene and when I got there I saw about seven people lying dead in the open and they were drenched in their own blood. Three guys were stripped naked and I could see their wounds. I was shocked and I shrieked terribly and I became wobbly. As soon as my mom heard me crying, she came running and took me away from the scene. She did not blame me for coming to the scene, instead she consoled me. I couldn't eat or sleep for several days and I had nightmares. I did not understand even what happened to these people lying on the ground, but I knew it was something dangerous because there was so much blood and really bad wounds. My mom did everything she could to calm me down and she helped bring me to my senses as she explained the whole situation.*

*This was the time when I started to sense death and whenever I think about it, these memories from Kalthok are refreshed in my mind. While I had always kept positive thoughts about my family, there were times when I would imagine my family killed and that scene in Kalthok again played out in my imagination. These images never left me even when I was trekking to Ethiopia or when I was living in refugee camps. Soon after I had a reunion with my family this memory began to finally wane in my mind. I still have it in my mind today but it does not occur to me as often as it did before I reunited with my family.*

*The other part of our story that we try to get people to understand is what our families were also thinking and feeling or imagining could have possibly happened to us after we fled. My mom told me that for the first few months or years after I left she would sit at night in her mosquito net and look out at all the four corners of our homestead to see if I would jump out of the bush and appear to her. If she heard anyone coming by, her heart would rapidly start pumping hoping that it would be me. When she heard another boy crying or playing somewhere in the village she always thought it was me. I was basically still living in her heart and her head. My brothers and sisters told me that my mom almost went crazy because of this and she would often wake up at night and talk to herself, singing out my name many times.*

*When I saw her in March 2006, she acknowledged that there were times when she imagined me dead and that thought alone made her sleepless. However, most of the time my mom somehow believed that I was alive. She had always hoped that I would show up someday before she died. She literally had been waiting for me to come home for eighteen years. When my mom saw me in 2006, she collapsed in front me as she was so overwhelmed emotionally and I was very worried about her. She regained her consciousness after several hours. The thing she asked me to do before anything else was for me to sit in her lap. She was not ready to say anything - she just held me and stared at me.*

*When she told me her stories about how she was thinking about me and praying for me and missing me every night, I cried and I said to her "Mom, if I knew the way, I would have come home, but now you can stop worrying about me." This is true for all of us because we feel bad for our parents and relatives who had to wait either for us to show up one day back home or to at least get some credible news about how we died and where and whether we were buried or left to rot.*

*The hardest part for us is after we finally see our families we also get to experience how destitute they are and their despair and struggle to keep themselves alive. When we look in the eyes of the children in our villages, who are either half or fully naked and barefooted and not in schools, we take it personally and we feel like we have failed this next generation. We do not want these children to ever experience what we went through.*

*Being poor ourselves we feel powerless and we tend to collapse under the pressure of expectations. For some, it is an inspiration to try and do something, for others they feel insignificant and see no worth in life.*

*The film, rightly named "Rebuilding Hope" tells a story of people's resilience and desire to remain hopeful even when the odds seem impossible. It is not rebuilding a lost hope per se because our people and even we, have never lost hope. Those who lost hope during the war are not alive today for there was only hope to sustain us. The hope we are trying to rebuild is the hope for a better future and a better life for the children that are growing up. The future we are trying to build is a new nation that will be born in 2011. A hope that Southern Sudan's children will never go to bed hungry nor will they be separated from their parents. It is a future in which justice, freedom, prosperity and equal citizenship before the law will be cherished. It is a future in which villages and towns will experience economic growth so the children can attend school, get proper medical attention and dream bigger dreams. It is a future where our experiences will only remain in history books and no child shall ever be exposed to such experiences ever again. The hope we are trying to rebuild is to transition our people from despair and instability to taking responsibility for their future into their own hands. Somehow we have found ourselves in the middle of this*

*responsibility by virtue of the fact that we are educated and we now live in the most powerful country; the United States.*

*We have climbed very high and swiftly on the ladder of responsibility, well above and beyond our age and capacity because we live in the United States of America. Our families expect us to bear full family responsibilities in terms of being the breadwinner and also making sure siblings and kin can go to school or get medical treatment when they get sick. On top of all that, the villagers expect us to bring change that can benefit not only our families but also the entire society. Notwithstanding that, even our governments expect us to help rebuild a new country that cherishes democratic values and prospers economically and socially. For some, this is a burden, for others like myself it is an opportunity to contribute to the rebuilding of the society.*

*Respectfully submitted by Abraham Awolich*



All contributions to Sudan Development Foundation are tax deductible. We are a 501(c) 3 organization working to restore peace and build sustainable self-reliant communities in Southern Sudan.

Please help us achieve our fundraising goal of \$50,000 in 2010 so we can begin construction on the first Community Resource and Training Center in Kalthok, South Sudan this coming winter.

All donations should be made out to:

SUDEF or Sudan Development Foundation  
139 Elmwood Avenue  
Burlington, VT 05401

Or you can use a credit card through our PAYPAL account on our web-site at [www.sudef.org](http://www.sudef.org)

For more information on how you can help SUDEF or to book our speaking tour: ***Southern Sudan: From Genocide to Independence*** or to book a screening of the film ***Rebuilding Hope*** please contact us at:

[info@sudef.org](mailto:info@sudef.org)

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