

Four freedoms award

Nomination bishop Paride Taban
Roosevelt Academy

A close-up, profile view of an elderly man with a thick, grey beard and glasses, looking towards the left. The background shows a lush green landscape with a wooden bridge over a river and a dirt path.

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Colophon

This recommendation of Emeritus Bishop Paride Taban for the International Four Freedoms Award 2018 was produced in cooperation with and at the initiative of the peace organisation Pax for Peace and Paul de Schipper (journalist/author).

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Photo credits by Paul de Schipper, Mariska van den Brink, PAX for Peace

Picture front page: Bishop Taban is building bridges between people literally and figuratively

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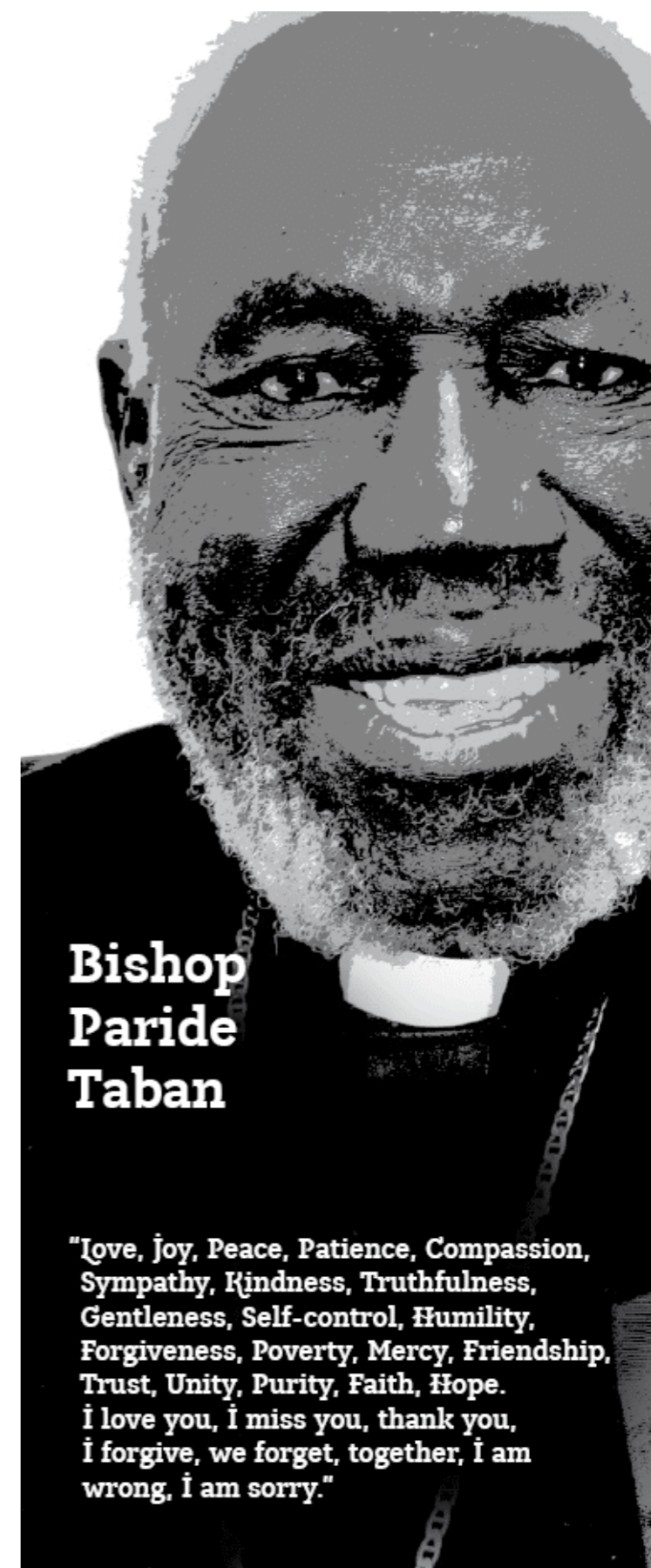
1. Introduction: a life devoted to peace and freedom

A long life full of war. And yet still devoting that long life to one goal: freedom and peace. each and every day. Remaining humane in inhuman conditions. Each and every day. Who in this world can manage that? Responding to ceaselessly depressing violence, prison and death threats with indomitable patience, tact, reconciliation, optimism and impressive, inspirational energy. Doing this for decades. That is only granted to the giants among us.

One of those giants is the relatively unknown peacemaker Emeritus Bishop Paride Taban of South Sudan. An indefatigable bridge builder at the local, national and international levels. In 2018, a prelate in the model peace village that he founded, complete with its Peace Academy.

Freedom and peace can be learnt. This is the message Paride Taban gives us with Kuron Peace Village, an island of peace functioning as a wonderful, enlightening beacon in a sea of renewed violence and war flaring up.

Bishop Paride Taban, a long life devoted to freedom and peace. Setting an example to us all. And especially to those whom he cherishes most — his people, the long-suffering people of South Sudan, “My people”. All good reasons for nominating an exceptional man, Emeritus Bishop Paride Taban, with support from all over the world, for the Roosevelt Four Freedoms Award 2018. At a time when a global gesture for peace and freedom in South Sudan is needed more than ever. Right now! ♦



**Bishop
Paride
Taban**

**“Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Compassion,
Sympathy, Kindness, Truthfulness,
Gentleness, Self-control, Humility,
Forgiveness, Poverty, Mercy, Friendship,
Trust, Unity, Purity, Faith, Hope.
I love you, I miss you, thank you,
I forgive, we forget, together, I am
wrong, I am sorry.”**



Bishop Taban among his people in Kuron Peace Village.

2. Recommendation for Bishop Paride Taban 'the peacemaker'

Paride Taban, The Peacemaker

A boy who fled the war carried on his uncle's shoulders. Who saw people being slaughtered while he was still a child. And who still grew up to devote his long life fearlessly and selflessly to one ambitious goal: bringing peace, freedom and development to the people of South Sudan who have been plagued for decades by almost indescribable horrors.

Emeritus Bishop Paride Taban is an indefatigable reconciler in the tradition of such great leaders as Bishop Desmond Tutu, Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela. Voice of the voiceless. An inspiring spokesman who brings people together and gives them hope.

For decades, Emeritus Bishop Paride Taban has sought to achieve the seemingly impossible task of bringing peace to South Sudan.

Ever since the 1960s, he has operated as a peacemaker at all levels. Under a shady tree as tribal chiefs quarrel about cattle but also as a bishop-diplomat in the national and international arena. He has gone far beyond his duties as a man of the church.

Taban is a visionary, gifted with patience and strategic insight. Deploying great wisdom, he is able to forge emotional connections with battling groups. A key tool in this is his deep respect for religions and cultures.

As his country's most respected campaigner for peace, Taban is blessed with inexhaustible optimism, courage, a great ability to deal with stress and an almost inhuman capacity for self-sacrifice.



Toposa homestead in Kuron Peace Village South Sudan

He manages to be the unusual combination of a religious leader and (compelled by the war) a worldly leader. He is someone with a driving, pragmatic force. What other bishop has his own airport built, hundreds of kilometres of road constructed and twelve bridges erected? His lifelong goal in a world of war has been to serve his people ('my people'), do good for them, give his long-suffering people hope, a way out, through the path of peace and freedom. It is this small man with his bushy grey beard, a shepherd and leader who managed to achieve something in war-torn South Sudan that the United Nations had never been able to do, namely create a centre for peace, a black Garden of Eden known as the Kuron Peace Village. An oasis in a cruel world. The only place in South Sudan where peace reigns. It is the realisation of his dream, a community that can serve as an example. The basis: education in peace, a message to be transmitted across the bush, savannah and mountains, where tanks rust, shepherd boys tread on mines and families shelter in caves. Harmony and reconciliation, a place of hope in an area where two generations have grown up knowing only war.

Emeritus Bishop Paride Taban has proved in Sudan and within the international community that he possesses exceptional leadership qualities that put him in an elevated position on a global scale.

It is these qualities coupled with his humour and heart-warming demeanour that have made him a shining example in the past few decades of internationally respected leadership in a South Sudan overshadowed by war. It is Emeritus Bishop Paride Taban who serves as an example to the world and to us through his dedication, his work and his life.

An example for his people, who are still suffering, for South Sudan and for us all.

Reason enough to nominate Emeritus Bishop Paride Taban and through him the people of South Sudan, his people, 'my people', for the International Roosevelt Four Freedoms Award or one of the separate Four Freedom Awards.

The nomination of Emeritus Bishop Paride Taban is supported by:

1. Mr.Kees van Baar, Human Rights Ambassador, Ministry of Foreign Affairs- the Netherlands
2. Anonymous- South Sudan
3. Mr.P.de Schipper- Netherlands
4. Misereor- Germany
5. Mr. Edmund Resor- USA
6. Mr.Pettersen x 2 and Mr.Johanssen- Norway
7. AGEH- Germany
8. Family of the late Fr.Matthieu Haumann – Bergen, the Netherlands
9. Mr.F.von Habsburg-Lothringen- South Sudan
10. Friends of Sister Emmanuelle – Belgium
11. Mrs.M.Schwaab, friend of the late Fr.Matthieu Haumann – Stuttgart, Germany
12. Maryknoll Sisters – Washington, USA
13. Mill Hill Missionaries Netherlands
14. Pastoor Janssen- Bergen, the Netherlands
15. Pax Christi International- Belgium (USA, South Africa)
16. PAX- the Netherlands
17. Christian Aid- United Kingdom
18. Mr.R.Rees- United Kingdom
19. Mr.Kapitein H.Schuurs bd.- the Netherlands
20. Catholic Relief Services - South Sudan/USA
21. John Ashworth- South Sudan

The above recommendations are included in Annex 1.

"I have never in my life, and I am now 81 years of age, **seen such great suffering of the South Sudanese** at the hands of other South Sudanese **like this.** It started on 15 December 2013 and **continues** to the present day."

Paride Taban in a letter to President Salva Kiir Mayardit of the Republic of South Sudan, 1 March 2017.



Bishop Paride Taban on one of his lobby visits in Europe

3. The life of Paride Taban

Data on Paride Taban Abraham Kenyi. Emeritus bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Torit. Founder of Holy Trinity Peace Village Kuron.

Born: Opari, South Sudan, 1936. Madi tribe, Logopi clan. Traditional name: Odega. Meaning: 'somebody born too late, 'somebody who overstayed in the womb'. Father a non-practising Muslim, mother an adherent of traditional religion.

1940

The family, with five children, moves to the regional town of Torit, on foot. His father obtains a job there with a colonial cotton company. An uncle carries the little boy on his shoulders for eighty-three kilometres. They travel in a group because roaming warriors make travel dangerous. Taban grows up in a factory community with many workers from different tribes. "That cured me early on of any form of tribalism."

1950

Taban is baptised a Christian. He is given the name Paride, derived from Paris, the legendary son of the King of Troy in Greek mythology.

1951

Taban attends the seminary in Okaru "because the missionaries wear such lovely clothes". He also learns how to make furniture and repair cars there. When Torit's garrison mutinies, the young Paride discovers what the violence of war involves. Hundreds die and the leader is cut into pieces.



Sheperds on the move with their cattle in the vast and remote borderlands of South Sudan and Kenya

1956

Sudan gains independence from Britain. The seminary is caught between two adversaries: government troops, and insurgents rebelling against the Arab north. The government soldiers kill southern intellectuals. Taban escapes execution and attempted assassinations.

1964

Juba, ordination as a priest. Receives a driving licence as a gift.

1966

There is a threat of Father Agostino being executed in Juba. His lawyer is able to secure his freedom. Taban: "Then we made the decision — Father Agostino, Mgr Laharanya and I — to stay with our people. Not to flee. Until 1972, we were the only priests in Equatoria in the east of South Sudan."

1966-1972

Taban operates within the church in a completely hostile environment. One day, a soldier in the Muslim- and Arab-leaning government army saves the lives of Taban and the sisters in a seminary. "Because I offered him a crate of beer and a bull for his soldiers and promised to sell him a second-hand Land Rover if he rescued us." Taban helps civilians and soldiers in the continuing state of war.

1972

South Sudanese rebels and the government in the north conclude the Addis Ababa Peace Agreement, after mediation by the World Council of Churches among others.



Youth warriors committed to peaceful transformation of their communities during a cross-border peace & sports workshop

1974

Taban exchanges two elephant tusks for two pairs of oxen and an ox plough in Uganda and successfully introduces them in South Sudan.

1976

Parish priest in Loa. Foundation of a cooperative: "Whereby we made it clear that the cooperative belonged to the people and not to a particular tribe or clan."

1977

Taban meets Ed Resor of Catholic Relief Services. Taban, who is exhausted at that point, is invited to go to the US. He works on Ed's father's ranch in Wyoming, where he helps repair fencing and clean stables.

1978

Foundation of the Sudanese Bishops' Conference.

1979

Pressure on Taban to go into politics. Taban refuses: "I didn't want to become a minister or have a position of power. I wanted to continue my blessed work as a priest."

1980

Taban is in Malakal when he hears someone call: "The radio says that that man has been appointed assistant bishop of Juba by the Vatican."

1980, 4 May

Ordination as bishop in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo, by Pope John Paul II. In the plane going there, his mother, who is flying for the first time, teaches him a lesson that Taban will always follow from that point on: "She taught me how you can avoid your own fear and neutralise your instinct for self-preservation by concentrating on the suffering of others who need help and comfort more than you yourself. That lesson has always helped me to overcome my fear in risky situations."

1981

Taban becomes closely involved in SudanAid/Caritas and the work in refugee camps.

1983

Taban is appointed bishop of the new diocese of Torit. A new guerrilla war breaks out in South Sudan.

1985

The war comes closer. Toposa elders read in the entrails of a goat that "a great power is approaching".

1986

The rebel army of the SPLA is nearing Torit. Taban remains there with three other priests. His only contact with the capital Juba now is via a short-wave radio.

1988

Taban travels with the other Sudanese bishops to Rome for a meeting with the pope. Back in Juba, he hears about the situation in Torit, now besieged by the rebels. There are many dead and wounded. The people are going hungry. Taban organises an aid convoy with one hundred lorries. Civilians travel in the lorries' cargo area. The journey is a hellish ordeal that takes weeks. The convoy, led by Taban, is bombarded and shot at. There are fatalities every day. An ambush results in sixty dead. Of the one hundred lorries, sixty eventually arrive in Torit.

1989

After a medieval siege of the town of Torit, it is captured by SPLA rebels. Taban disappears off the face of the earth. For months he is held in inhuman conditions in an SPLA bush prison.

1989/1990

After he has been freed, Taban initiates the foundation of the New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC) with the aim of coordinating aid and relief in the south. He becomes its chairman and Father Mathieu Haumann of Mill Hill Missionaries acts as his secretary and gives him day-to-day support. Where the civilian structure (infrastructure, transport, healthcare, education etc.) has been destroyed by the war, the NSCC starts to build its own structure through the church.

1991

Mengistu's regime in Ethiopia, which has been the mainstay of the SPLA rebels, collapses. The new regime chases all the Sudanese out of the country. A mass of refugees start crossing the Ethiopian-Sudanese border. Taban travels there with Haumann. They have nothing to offer them. When Haumann asks whether there is any point to this, Taban says: "It is easier to shake hands when your hands are empty." Taban stands at the border and personally greets the refugees on

the bank of the river that runs along the border. He sees a woman give birth to a baby in the water. The image of the tens of thousands of refugees, especially the children, would remain with him for ever. It is one more in a long series of tragedies in South Sudan.

1993

Taban opens a church centre and relief base in Narus, a settlement on the border between Kenya and Sudan. The bishop is increasingly focusing on an international campaign for peace in South Sudan. When Pope John Paul II visits the regime in Khartoum, a BBC reporter asks Taban what he wants to say about that visit to the pope. His answer: "Your Holiness, you are going to Khartoum to see your flock there. A large red carpet is being rolled out for you, but be aware that the hand that greets you is dripping with the blood of your Christians."

1994

Advent letter from NSCC, 1994: "The Africans in Sudan have been exploited for centuries. The slave trade is still continuing. The politics of the regime in Khartoum is worse than Apartheid. Apartheid still allowed development. The politics of successive regimes in Khartoum are of conquest, exploitation, slavery, islamisation and war. There is no other nation in Africa that has known so much oppression as Sudan."

1995

Taban travels through his diocese and also visits communities in Western Equatoria. Sometimes he travels straight across the firing lines. One evening, the rebel leader Garang promises to organise gunfire so that the government soldiers stay under cover and Taban is able to drive through. Taban does not tell his travelling companion Haumann all the details. Taban: "It was raining grenades on both sides, soldiers were using dead bodies for protection. We drove and we reached our destination."

1997

The war has destroyed all the roads in Taban's diocese. Taban thinks that the communities needed connections to one another so that they can communicate with one another. The 'contractor' Taban therefore decides to build a road from the Kenyan border to the easternmost part of his diocese, the district of Kuron. The 300-kilometre-long 'Taban Highway' is excavated and paved using a bulldozer that the rebels have captured from the government. The project manager is the Dutchman Ydo Jacobs.

1999

The war between the SPLA rebels and the Arab north degenerates into an internal tribal conflict that costs countless human lives. The SPLA splits into factions. Taban continually tries to intercede between them.

2000

Air-raid shelters are built in the school that Taban had established in Narus.

2000

Construction of a bridge over Kuron River, start of Taban's Peace Village project. Haumann on Taban: "He prefers to drive an old Land Rover than run a diocese."

"I will never, never let down **the people of South Sudan**, the people for whom and with whom my **suffering began** in 1964 as a young priest. **The suffering continues**, believe me, and **I will never abandon my country and people**. I promise to continue to my grave."

Paride Taban in a letter to President Salva Kiir Mayardit of the Republic of South Sudan, 1 March 2017.

“These are my twenty-eight terms
that can **build peace** and **let us live
peacefully together**: love, pleasure,
peace, patience, empathy, sympathy,
friendliness, truth, humility, poverty,
forgiveness, mercy, friendship, trust,
unity, purity, politeness, self-control,
loyalty, hope, I love you, I miss you,
thank you, I forgive, we forget, together,
I am wrong, I am sorry.”

Paride Taban.

2004

Taban asks the pope to relieve him of his duties as the administrative bishop of Torit. The pope gives him dispensation.

2005

After twenty-two years of civil war, peace is signed in Kenya between North and South Sudan.

2005

The new South Sudanese government gives Taban ten square kilometres of land on which to build a Peace Village, a place of peace and meeting point for tribes that are often on hostile terms. “A place among the poor and the most abandoned,” as Taban put it.

2005

Together with Pax Christi, Taban initiates a cross-border Peace & Sports programme in South Sudan, Uganda and Kenya. The aim is to give young soldiers from different, conflicting tribes the opportunity to meet one another in peacetime and deconstruct their conflicts, and to help them find a better way of living without violence.

2006

The Peace Village started to take shape with the construction of a school, a clinic, an agricultural information centre and a community house.

2008

Together with peace actors from Eastern Equatoria, Jonglei, Karamoja (Uganda) and Turkana (Kenya), the Peace Village organises a cross-border v and peace conference peacefully bringing together 400 youth warriors from tribes on hostile terms in Toposa, Murle, Didinga, Buya, Jie, Turkana and Karamajong, along with local leaders from the three countries, to promote peace and break the cycle of intercommunal violence and cattle raiding.

2009

The Peace Village develops into an oasis of peace in South Sudan, still plagued by the resurgence of conflicts. Taban’s Christmas message, 2009: “When His disciples asked Jesus where He lived, the answer was ‘Come and see.’ If anyone asks me where I live, I say ‘Come and see’. Thank you to everyone who has given us support. Love is the key to Heaven.”

2011

South Sudan gains independence.

2013

Militants from the two most populous tribes, the Dinka and Nuer, commit large-scale slaughter. Start of a new civil war.

2014

Taban intercedes, with the support of NCA and Pax Christi, to obtain a peace agreement between the rebel faction of David Yau Yau and the South Sudanese government.

2015

In the presence of five European ambassadors, the governor of Eastern Equatoria and David Yau

Yau, Taban launches the Kuron Peace Academy. Now all the elements of the Peace Village will be covered by the Academy: living by setting an example, development, mediation and dialogue in the community, and an exchange programme to bring people from South Sudan and international people together in the Peace Village to generate reconciliation and change in South Sudan.

2015

The clinic in the Peace Village obtains its own doctor.

2016

With the support of the EU, Taban and the staff at the Peace Village get a road built between Narus and Kuron.

2016

Resurgence of violence, thousands flee. The UN warns of genocide.

2016

The Peace Village peace team successfully mediates in a regional tribal conflict about cattle raiding.

2017

Famine in South Sudan. ♦

"The war is taking a heavy toll on us. Our children have been deprived of their youth, many of us are traumatised, but **we continue to trust that peace will come.** We believe in God, in our people and in the people who have not lost their faith in Sudan. Our situation is not hopeless."

Paride Taban.



South Sudanese women leaders Teody A.D.Lotto and Sr Pasquina working together with Bishop Taban

4. The black garden of Eden, a story

By Paul de Schipper

A peace village in Sudan?

Yes, that's right.

Surely Sudan means famine, a temporary peace for a couple of months, a couple of years maybe, followed by war, death, tribal vendettas, murderous warlords, farmsteads in flames, bullets, bombs, mines, families hiding in caves, children in dugouts. Sudan! That is Western powerlessness and a fight for oil. South Sudan, which seemed to be catching its breath after a war that lasted 22 years. In that same South Sudan, a small black man with a bushy grey beard has managed to achieve something that the United Nations had never been able to do. Bishop Paride Taban founded a peace village. This is the story of a journey through mud to a black 'Garden of Eden'.

But first Taban: watchmaker, car mechanic and bishop, probably the only bishop in the world with his own airfield. I spoke to him in January 1989 by radio. I was a reporter in the South Sudanese capital of Juba, a fortress besieged by rebels where the government army was hiding behind a ring of refugee camps and minefields. Children were walking on mines and rebels were shooting grenades into the camps. The only sign I could see of the ever-cheerful stonemason was a pile of bloodied rags on a grave.

The Irish priest John Garry had a church there. Because the fearful refugees were moving ever closer to the town centre, the church was automatically getting closer to the front line. John Garry told me about another town 120 kilometres to the east, on the other side of the Nile. He spoke of a medieval siege, a population on the verge of starvation and an emaciated garrison where the soldiers died from exhaustion with money in their pockets — worthless money that they could not even use to buy rats as the place was out of those beasts too. He told me about a bishop who was running this town. "You can talk to the bishop via the radio," said John Garry. He took me to

Nyall Martin, another Irishman and the missionary who manned the radio.

It sounded like a voice coming from hell, a desperate voice, almost impossible to understand through the crackle of the short-wave transmitter. "Children are falling dead in the street, my people are dying. The rats cost six dollars, my people are running through the bush like wildebeests, searching for food. Tell the world, Paul."

"My people are running through the bush like wildebeest." That is one of those sentences you will never forget. Taban was the bishop of the doomed town of Torit. He had just given up his last drum of diesel, for the Caterpillar excavator with which he personally dug a mass grave and buried the dead.

At that point, hundreds of thousands of people had taken flight throughout South Sudan. They were living off leaves and wild fruits. They fell dead on the paths in the bush, prey for the hyenas, which left behind white droppings, a sign that they were also consuming the bones. By then, Taban was already a folk hero among the people of South Sudan. When the rebels laid siege to his town, he sneaked through the lines to fetch help in the capital, Juba.

On 31 May 1988, a food convoy with 100 lorries left Juba for the famished town of Torit, accompanied by an escort of government soldiers. It became a descent into hell. "We were continually being shot at, there were ambushes, the lorries rode over mines. There were one or two fatalities every day. There were many Muslims among the soldiers. They said, 'Bishop, pray for us'. I tried to hurry the convoy along but we were surrounded by the rebels. They bombarded us with grenades. On one day, we lost 40 lorries and 50 people were killed. I buried the victims along the side of the road. Then we drove the convoy into the bush. We created a road where there was no road. The rebels, who wanted the food, kept on shooting. It was night-time, it was raining grenades and we only had 50 lorries left, but the rebels didn't know where we were. The commander of the government troops escorting us said, 'Don't shoot back because that will give away our position'. We were only 12 kilometres from Torit. People came up to my car in tears: 'Bishop, we won't make it'. The next morning, soldiers came from the town to relieve us. It had taken us 31 days to cover over 130 kilometres. The food we had brought ran out in November. People sold their clothes to have something to eat. They sold their mattresses, I sold my shoes. Soldiers shot into the water to catch fish. They exchanged their weapons for 20 litres of cereal and placed bullets in the collection plate during Mass. The government organised food airdrops but the rebels shot the parachutes to pieces. The food fell in the rebel territory. That was at the end of January 1989, when you came on the radio. You were the last person I spoke to before I disappeared. It was my last radio contact with the outside world. Torit fell on 26 February. The rebels captured me. I spent 100 days in a bush prison. On the 25th anniversary of my ordination as a priest, 24 May 1989, they took me to Torit and put me under house arrest. The world thought I was dead. I was only freed one year later."

I recorded the radio conversation and often listened to the tape again afterwards. I wanted to see the face that belonged with that voice. Who was the man who had led a food convoy through grenades and minefields to a besieged town? The man who had kept the people going in the starving town of Torit, who had squatted above a group latrine to do his business every day for 100 days in a bush prison.

Years later, he came on a visit to friends in Brabant. While he dug into a Bossche bol (a kind of local profiterole), I gave him a copy of the tape and played it to him. He was moved to tears.

Taban was born in 1937 in a small village on the border between Sudan and Uganda. His father worked as a guard for a British colonial sawmill. "There were trees so big that we needed ten children to put our arms round the trunk." Paride was the oldest of four children. His mother had

"Once, the bishop said: 'If you have nothing more to give, **you can still give your hand**'. He shares not only what he has but also what he is."

Tjeu Haumann MHM.

two stillborn babies before Paride. He went to the sawmill's school: "Good education. We had lessons in the classroom in the morning and handcrafts in the afternoon. That was how I learnt about car maintenance and how to make furniture and repair watches."

When aged 15, he joined the seminary run by the Comboni fathers. This Italian missionary order had brought Catholicism to South Sudan in 1870. Why did he become a priest? "I found the fathers' robes so wonderful. Yes it was the uniform, their cassocks that did it. The religious inspiration only came later."

He grew up speaking English: "The Italian missionaries taught me to write in my tribal language." In 1964 he was ordained as a priest. That was just when the war broke out in South Sudan. "The Comboni fathers fled. I stayed behind with two other priests; three men for a diocese covering 80,000 square kilometres. That is a diocese almost three times the size of your country, the Netherlands. I then became headmaster of a school."

Paride Taban had lost none of his energy after his time in prison. He set up the New Sudan Council of Churches, a body that tirelessly called for peace negotiations. One of his most dramatic actions during that period was the welcoming of 150,000 Sudanese who had been chased out of Ethiopia. Mill Hill missionary Tjeu Haumann, who was Taban's right-hand man at that time, told me about it. These are heroic, even apocalyptic images: "We were next to the river that forms the border between Sudan and Ethiopia. Another 50,000 people were still supposed to be on their way. I felt uncomfortable because we had nothing to offer. Taban only seemed to be getting more energy. He walked up to the river with the bishop's cross around his neck. There they arrived in their dozens, hundreds, wading, carrying everything they possessed on their heads, sometimes with a cow or goat swimming ahead of them. Nuer and Dinka. He went up to the first ones who arrived and pulled them out of the river on the

Sudanese side. Later we waded into the water. Taban stood there with me next to him on a couple of stones in the middle of the river, shaking hands and welcoming people. Hundreds, thousands, I don't remember any more. You often saw happy faces, people who recognised their bishop. That was how Taban let his people know they had not been forgotten."

While the war was still raging, Taban was already working on the reconstruction phase. Realising the importance of communication and transport, he had a 200-kilometre long path flattened in 1997. It ran from the Kenyan border to the border with Ethiopia, the far corner of his diocese. "The rebels had captured a bulldozer from the government army, so we used that."

This became the Taban highway. A road to a remote corner of the world and a bishop who is also a contractor and road builder. This was the road that took me to the Peace Village in 2007. I had driven along part of the road before, ten years previously. But the road is again in a poor state of repair, the hardened surface crumbling from all the traffic. The tyre tracks have become channels with streams running down them. With a little luck, you can reach an average of 20 kilometres per hour. There are not really any roads at all in this part of South Sudan. Only cars with four-wheel drive or trucks with six-wheel drive can be used for the transport of people and goods, to the extent the imposing forces of nature allow.

Lorries get stuck in the mud as soon as it starts to rain, requiring rescue operations that then get stuck in turn. The rain turns paths and tyre tracks into rivers in which every man-made form of transport becomes stranded. Then you see African men removing cubic metres of mud with their bare hands to free up the wheels.

The bishop: "An average of three cars a week pass through, and one a month in the rainy season." There are countless tales of pickup trucks stuck for days in the sludge, sometimes carrying five to ten people and with little or no food or water.

At the end of that road, that path, lies the end of the world, protected by a solid mountain ridge. That is Kuron Peace Village.

His village, his creation, his life's work

Let's start with the morning.

The bishop unzips his blue dome tent. The pale light of dawn blots out the last stars from the African sky. The bishop sticks his head out, looks up at the sky and says: "Rain today? Possibly. Good morning and God bless you." The bishop who prefers to sleep in a dome tent on a much-used mattress stands up and rearranges his T-shirt and shorts, his night-time attire. He slides his black feet into a pair of pink plastic flip-flops and saunters over to a hut made of green corrugated metal sheets — the shower room. En route, he greets the cook, the watchman and the mechanic who looks after his truck. "Good morning..., good morning, Bishop."

The cries of children can be heard behind us, coming from the bushes on the steep mountain slopes. The first herd of goats is climbing upwards, driven by two little lads aged about five. Bluish smoke wafts through the reed walls of the kitchen hut, the sign of a fire that is not yet burning properly. A woman sweeps the place clean using a bundle of twigs, her rear in the air and head close to the ground, her arm moving rhythmically back and forth in a semi-circle, in a posture that would shock any physiotherapist.

The door to the shower hut creaks open and then shut again. The bishop rams the steel door handle in place. Now he is wearing a bathrobe appropriately coloured Catholic purple. A towel is draped around his neck and a toothbrush handle sticks out of his mouth. He walks up and down brushing his teeth, then rinses his mouth out at the communal tap and walks to the room

"All the people of Sudan **believe in God**. The hundreds of tribes in Sudan all have a name for God. In Sudan, there used to be wars about slaves, about land. **There was never a war about religion**. The church and the mosque never quarrelled. The people waging war now are **using religion to strengthen their political position**. I don't know how many of them are religious."

From Paride Taban's Christmas message in 2000.

that functions as his office. He starts straight away on his morning exercises: jumps, with his arms swinging out wide in an imaginary fitness rhythm, followed by 1000 steps up and down. "The Lord wants me to stay fit: I can serve him for longer if my body is healthy."

A new day for Bishop Paride Taban, a new day in Kuron Peace Village in the easternmost part of South Sudan.

"A peace village? I came up with that idea when I was in prison. A peace village to serve as an example for my country, which had been at war for so long. My great inspiration was the Dutch missionary Tjeu Haumann. He had given his heart to Sudan, to Sudan and to peace. He thought that I should bring all those tribes together in peace. No more cattle raids, no more killings. You know, there is a small tribe in northern Uganda, called the Ik. They live together with several families in one home. They don't slaughter animals, they don't have any cows, they live on honey and vegetables. They avoid conflicts and try to live in peace. Their houses have two doors. If an angry person enters through one door, they slip out of the other door." Taban squeezes his nose shut with his fingers: "They say quarrels and war have a bad smell."

The Garden of Eden

"I drove here through the woods. There was no war here. There were antelopes, giraffes wandered around, buffaloes and kudus. Nobody lived there. Nomads used it as grassland. There were no villages but it was green and fertile. There was a river, the Kuron. Two military engineers, Harry Brekelmans and Sjef Hamers, had built a Bailey bridge across that river in 2000. In 2005, the new government of South Sudan granted me ten square kilometres of land to build a village, a village where people from all tribes would be able to live together in peace, where there would be no quarrels about cattle, no tribal conflicts. When we had finished the first buildings, people started to come. They looked around and said: 'This is good'. This led to new villages sprouting up around the Peace Village. People support themselves with arable and livestock farming. There are now 81 families living in the Peace Village itself. There are no more cattle raids. The people who live here come from five different tribes. Everyone lives in peace. Schools are being set up, we are busy organising peace education. The idea is that this village will set an example for South Sudan."

He drives me around, across expanses of mud flats, amid acacias and pink desert flowers. Beyond lie the mountains, the foothills of the Ethiopian highlands. On the plains, the savannah is gradually turning into semi-desert.

We pass Toposa villages with huts that resemble egg-cups. We see the occasional water pump. Thanks to Western aid, at 8000 euros apiece. The villages are asked to make a symbolic gift of five cows in return. Those cows are worth about 400 euros. Taban tugs at the wheel.

No, this is not your pampered prelate. He is as likely to wash his hands in diesel oil as in holy water. One morning, he stands bent over the bonnet of the episcopal truck, grease on his hands, blowing into a clogged fuel pump.

He is officially now an emeritus bishop but everyone still calls him 'Bishop'.

At 71, the man is in excellent physical condition thanks to his daily exercises.

He thinks nothing of driving for eight hours along routes that are barely passable for cars, routes that have already cost one of his trucks 10,000 euros in new parts this month.

He once collided with a donkey and killed it. The bishop's cross on his chest saved him from a fatal shot from the furious owner.

He is driving me to a spot where a health centre is being built thanks to the support of Johan

Bonink from Tilburg. It has a wind turbine that should pump up water for the centre from an underground source. An expensive wind turbine, built with money raised in the Netherlands. But the turbine doesn't work — the water is too far down. These things happen. Then onto the airfield. He steers his Toyota Land Cruiser onto the start of the one-kilometre-long airstrip covered with gravel, turns the car and puts his foot down.

"I want to fly," he cries. Shrieking with delight, he easily reaches 100 kilometres per hour by the end of the airstrip. Joy-riding with a bishop on a deserted runway in Africa. Life can be wonderful. The brakes squeak as if a Boeing was landing. The bishop slaps me on the knee, still enjoying the experience: "Nice, huh."

Now the strip is left for the donkeys and goats to return that bounded off just now into the bush in panic.

The nomads who have settled around the Peace Village call it a "town". Taban: "That's because we have brick buildings. They associate that with towns."

A Peace Village, but there are threats.

A peace treaty was signed in South Sudan on 31 December 2004, but by then a deadly new war had broken out in Darfur.

Taban: "The war in Darfur is being prolonged by the Islamic regime in Khartoum. They are using that war to try and sabotage the peace process in the south. The north wants the oil. No one knows how much oil is being produced. They sell it to China. Part of the proceeds are supposed to go to the south for reconstruction, but that contribution has not been paid for three months now. The peace process in the south is being undermined in every way possible. Oil and cash are becoming the instruments that will be used to sabotage the coming elections."

South Sudan is an inhospitable country. It is the same size as France and Spain combined and has not a single kilometre of tarmac road. After the peace agreement, reconstruction started with the help of funds from the United Nations. An army of international aid workers descended on the capital Juba. NGOs such as Oxfam, Save the Children, the Red Cross and the other charity troops were in the vanguard, followed by traders and adventurers. "Juba is the most expensive city in the world after New York," says one aid worker. "You pay 200 dollars a night to sleep in a tent. Everyone wants to recoup their investment as quickly as possible. New buildings, road construction, oil, they walk around with dollar signs in their eyes. Filling their pockets and getting out quick if any problems arise. The situation is completely unstable as the Dinka dominate the government. That is asking for trouble, for the other tribes also want some influence and a share in the new prosperity."

In the eastern corner of South Sudan, Paride Taban feeds his cats in the morning and runs a realm of peace. He is slowly but surely building up the Peace Village, helped by a large group of European sponsors.

"People in Europe sometimes get angry at me because things don't happen as they want them to. I tell them: 'Come here and see how we have to live'." When a visitor from Europe complained because he had to wait two days before a car could take him back to Kenya, to the civilised world, Taban replied: "Heh, you only waited two days. We have been waiting 40 years ... for peace." The man from Europe looked down at his shoes rather shamefacedly.

Waiting. I wait five days for a car that is going to the Peace Village. It is a race against the approaching rainy season. On the day I am due to leave the Peace Village and return to Kenya, it starts raining at four in the morning. The car that is supposed to take me does not arrive as the road is impassable. No single ticket to a cold beer for me, then.

"You should respect fear. Like every African, I love life. **Life is a very precious gift** and a fragile possession too. If you try to cling on to it with all your might, you squeeze it until it breaks. You need to **hold it** gently in your hands and **be grateful** for the gift."

Paride Taban about fear.

"The rainmaker has been sweating," says the bishop cryptically.

In the Netherlands, we look at satellite images to forecast the weather but in South Sudan the predictions for a good harvest come from the entrails cut out of a goat. Taban: "And if the rains don't come, they put the rainmaker in the village square in a ring of fire. Of course the man starts sweating. Then it starts raining. At least, they hope it does."

Meanwhile the rain keeps me captive in the Peace Village. "Well," says the bishop, pointing to two small, four-wheel-drive trucks, "We still have the Unimogs. They can get you anywhere, even through hell, purgatory and onto paradise. No, not today, tomorrow perhaps."

I wait.

"Wait!"

That is the key word in this part of the world. One day, two days ... I ask the bishop whether he could arrange for the rainmaker to sweat.

One day later he says: "It can be done, the road is drying out, the lorry will take you to crossroads on the other side of the river. The herdsmen bring their cattle there to drink. A car belonging to a missionary who lives in the mountains will pick you up and take you to Kenya." I climb into the truck. We bump along for four hours to our meeting point. Suddenly we see a fast-flowing river in front of us. The driver looks down distrustfully, hesitates, then puts his foot down. We enter the water. The truck turns into a ship complete with bow wave. Pity the poor frogs that get crushed in the radiator. A 30-metre-long crossing followed by a steep, slippery slope back up. The wheels of the truck try somehow to get a grip, the 20-tonne vehicle's engine groans, we climb a couple of metres, then slide back. Stranded. This land is tougher than the best materials humans have been able to devise. Then all of a sudden a tractor appears on the opposite bank. A chain does the rest. We reach the crossroads. No car and no missionary. Apparently, he didn't even set out. Which leaves you sat there, surrounded by a group of friendly, smiling, half-naked herdsmen. I wait. What choice do I have?

After an hour, two cars appear on the opposite bank. This turns out to be an expedition of Belgian anthropologists. They are trying to map the history of the tribes who have been roaming East Africa since 1500. They are on their way to Kenya, plough through the river, get stuck and are hauled up by the tractor. I get a lift: 13 hours in the back of a pickup truck, sight-seeing in South Sudan in 40 degrees. What travel agency can offer you that? We don't reach Kenya that evening. We spend the night in the bush, next to a Toposa village protected by thorny shrubs. The Belgians sleep in tents while I have to make do with an 'emergency' hammock made from parachute fabric. With no mosquito net and with a towel as a blanket. Luckily the wind is blowing, which keeps the mosquitoes away. What's more, Geert, one of the Belgians, pours me a delicious vodka liqueur. The two of us sit there like night owls, enjoying the stars in the sky and the sounds of the night. Using a towel as a blanket, I climb into the hammock and sleep like a log, oblivious to the hyenas and other wild animals that could bite you in the rear.

The next morning, it takes us another four hours to reach the Kenyan border.

My mobile phone starts working again there. There is a text message from the bishop, sent using his satellite phone. Have I arrived yet? "Are you safe?" I send confirmation.

Paride Taban's reply: "Thx 2 God." ♦

"Thank God that

He gave South Sudan

this man."

Alberto J. Eisman, author of *Peace deserves a chance*, a biography of Paride Taban.



South Sudanese children need to be educated for the future of South Sudan (Bishop Taban)

5. Kuron Peace Village Academy

Island of peace

Kuron Peace Village is a model village in the easternmost part of South Sudan. A tiny island of peace in an ocean of conflicts. The village was founded in 1997 by Bishop Paride Taban, as a place of peace and hope and a centre for reconciliation, and as an inspirational model community for a severely damaged nation that was still suffering every day.

Kuron Peace Village is based on the core values of the pastoral South Sudanese way of life and traditional customs, religion and culture. This has its roots in small-scale arable farming and extensive livestock farming. The cow as the source of all life. And as the key to tribal and clan-based conflicts over natural resources.

'Peace is possible in South Sudan'. Kuron Peace Village shows the South Sudanese this every day. The village's success also demonstrates that building a nation with a central authority that is accepted by all requires more than just the presence of a government and soldiers.

As an individual, Emeritus Bishop Paride Taban has played a unique role in this process. His merits as a peace-maker, his status and his personality give the people just that feeling of warmth and security that is needed to build a cohesive nation state from the bottom up, starting with the microcosm of Kuron Peace Village.

"You want to know what's left of what you built up? Well, **some people starved** to death, **others were killed** in the war, **but most of them have survived**. They send you greetings."

Bishop Taban's reply to a question from Norwegian development workers who had been evacuated from South Sudan.

The cornerstones of Kuron Peace Village are:

- ◆ Food production on a demonstration farm, where residents learn how to improve their food situation using new farming techniques. The goal — preventing famine and conflict.
- ◆ Primary, secondary and adult education, in which knowledge is an instrument for achieving peace.
- ◆ The Peace Academy, all elements of the work in Peace Village with a peace strategy at heart are now (since 2015) united under the Academy. In addition to a range of activities such as community dialogue, mediation, trauma counselling and cultural events, there are also targeted peace education programmes. These programmes make use of sport, theatre and exchanges. Kuron Peace Academy stands for hope in South Sudan. It is an inspirational meeting point for the South Sudanese, a place where they can learn, a retreat, but above all a centre for peace and reconciliation.

The aim is for Kuron Peace Academy to act as a catalyst for peace in South Sudan, a country torn apart by war. ◆

Annex 1: Recommendations

Recommendation 1

I've known bishop Paride Taban since 2009, when I was the Dutch Vice-Ambassador to Kenya. The bishop was actively involved in a multicountry programme to prevent violence and cattle raids between the warriors of pastoralist tribes in Kenya, Southern Sudan and Uganda. It appeared he played a key role in bringing different tribes together and to teach them how to live together peacefully. This was quite necessary as the victims of violent tribal clashes was rising steeply. When I became the ambassador to South Sudan and we saw the threat of an ethnic cleansing in the conflict between the Murle, Nuer and Dinka, it was the bishop who, on a very silent and long mission, was able to appease the tribes and to convince the rebel leaders to sign a peace agreement. It was a shining light in those dark days of conflict in South Sudan.

In the meantime the bishop continued working in Kuron Peace Village to get the tribes in that area living in peace together. One of the important things he achieved, is to get the youth into agriculture, so their strength and energy is devoted to food production and less to warring and cattle raiding.

In the time of war with the North, it was thanks to the bishop that the people of the South had still access to education, healthcare and drinking water.

The amazing efforts of this man, working in a corner of the world where many fear to tread, this man reaches out to those warring and brings them peace.

Kees van Baar
Human Rights Ambassador



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Recommendation 2

The first time I met Bishop Paride Taban he was on a bicycle. This was back in 1984 when he had been bishop of Torit for about one year. I had gone there to meet him and I was still trying to arrange an appointment when he, warned by the bush telegraph, already came to me -- the bike just happened to be the fastest way.

To delay things because of protocol has never been his thing. Children have to be educated; the sick need treatment; famine demands relief if not improved farming; when there are cattle raids people have to be reconciled and enlightened; when there is war the political leaders need talking to. And so with Bishop Taban there is always a sense of urgency that is never stopped by personal feelings, whether pride or fear.

The visibility of his work has often brought him into life threatening situations, especially in his twenties and early thirties during the Anyanya war and in his late forties and fifties in the SPLA war. In those periods he had to lead a peripatetic life and one side effect of this was that more than once he had to build new housing for himself. It took me a while to discover that every time he had to do this he tried to build a secret escape route in his construction. He knew the risks he ran, he tried to reduce them and went on with the job.

During his long life he must have given sermons to tens of thousands of people and knowing South Sudan many of these audiences must have been beset by fear, anguish, sorrow and worries. They would not have known the inspiring details in his personal life but he gave them a sense of courage, of a drive to improve and of fearlessness, no matter what.

After all the wars of the past the South Sudanese have never been worse off than now in 2017. The talents of Bishop Paride Taban, honed over a life time, have never been more needed than now in his old age.

March 2017

Anonymous worker in warzones in South Sudan for three decades

Recommendation 3

Taban, a Power Priest

As a journalist, I first visited South Sudan in 1985. War, death, a place where God was cruel to His people. Or had he forgotten them, perhaps? Conditions that confirmed all the standard clichés, the back of beyond for someone with preconceptions who saw the West as the centre of the world.

I met Paride Taban for the first time in 1989. It was a bizarre encounter, a voice, no more than that. A desperate voice from the inferno that came via the sky — a crackling short-wave transmitter in the sweaty South Sudanese capital of Juba. Taban: "My people are running through the bushes like wildebeest, tell the world...!"

I had a return ticket in my back pocket. Taban could have fled the country but he did not flee. Prison, the almost daily threat of death, these things affected him, deeply, but through all those decades he was able to convert his people's pain and misfortune into a seemingly inexhaustible source of positive energy.

In a way that is only granted to the giants among us. In a country where the suffering people had lost all sense of stability, he managed to arrange stability, a safety net and structure, often with only simple resources. He did this by creating church structures with activities that went much further than in a standard Western church organisation. By founding schools and clinics, by building bridges and roads.

In the course of my work as a journalist in hot spots all over the world, I have met many leaders in crisis situations (usually temporary). Strong leaders and failing leaders. But I have never met anyone of the calibre of Paride Taban, someone who as a church leader has spent his whole life operating in life-threatening crisis situations. But who has also found the strength to persevere and has managed to ceaselessly inspire the people of South Sudan and his supporters in the West. That puts him head and shoulders above everyone else, in my opinion. Which is why he and his people deserve fitting worldwide recognition. Emeritus Bishop Paride Taban is a Power Priest in the best sense of the term.

Paul de Schipper

Journalist and author

Travelled to South Sudan for the first time in 1985 for the civil war. In the years that followed, produced numerous travel reports on South Sudan and East Africa for the newspaper BNDeStem, and the press organisations Zuid-Oost-Pers and Wegener Dagbladen.

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Recommendation 4

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

24.03.2017

Dear Madam,
dear Sir,

MISEREOR is the German Catholic Bishop's Organization for Development Cooperation. For over 50 years MISEREOR has been committed to fight poverty in Africa, Asia and Latin America. MISEREOR's support is available to any human being in need – regardless of his/her religion, ethnicity or gender.

Bishop Paride was Bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Torit, South Sudan, from 1983 to 2004. During the civil war, Bishop Paride advocated on behalf of the people in Eastern Equatoria, placing his own life on the line as he did so. When facilitating food deliveries to areas in conflict, he accepted to be taken prisoner. (He was accused of supplying soldiers with food.) Before and after the peace agreement was concluded in 2005, Bishop Paride was frequently asked to serve as a mediator in both small and large-scale disputes. Even his advancing age did not keep him from flying to areas under conflict in order to negotiate with the insurgents, which he did very successfully. Bishop Paride is valued as an upright, trustworthy bringer of peace by both the people of his own country and by others. The government has also called on him to serve as a mediator on repeated occasions.

After retiring from Diocesan administration, Bishop Emeritus Paride founded the Kuron Peace Village, fulfilling a lifelong dream. During his travels to Israel, he had experienced how people in 'kibbutzim' lived and worked together in peace. His desire was to appropriately translate this experience into reality in the remote area of his Diocese around Kuron, where the various pastoralist groups had repeatedly been fighting over cattle. At the Peace Village, he gives them the opportunity to attend school and visit health centres together, among other things, so that the people may realise that former enemies are just human beings as themselves. MISEREOR has supported a large-scale health programme in the Diocese of Torit. In the programme's health centres everyone receives care regardless of their ethnic or religious affiliation.

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MISEREOR
IHR HILFSWERK

For many decades, these health centres were the sole source of health care in an area the size of France.

MISEREOR has had the privilege to cooperate with the Bishop for many years. Especially during the civil war in South Sudan, MISEREOR came to know him as an absolutely outstanding personality. Due to his tireless efforts, he was able to promote peace and reconciliation between communities in his country. The peace village in Kuron in Southeast of South Sudan was also supported by MISEREOR and other aid organizations.

We would like to highly recommend Bishop Emeritus Paride Taban for the Four Freedoms Award.

Yours sincerely
For Misereor



Maria Klatte
Head, Africa & Middle East Dept.

Organisation for Development Œuvre épiscopale d'aide au développement Obra episcopal para el desarrollo Obra Episcopal para o Desenvolvi

Recommendation 5

I am also writing on behalf of many brave people in South Sudan who are doing what they can to help their fellow man. A Four Freedoms award for Bishop Paride would honor and inspire them.

I met Father Paride in Torit in 1974. Our friendship has grown continually stronger over all of these years. He visited my family in Wyoming in 1977, married my wife and me in 1983, and baptized two of our children one in Khartoum and one in New York. I have worked now 42 years with many Sudanese in the North and the South.

In 1974, I was advised to work with Father Paride if I wanted a project to be a lasting success. I learned Father Paride's special gift was not what he could fix or make with his own hands, but how he could instruct and inspire others to do the same, making bricks and tiles to repair churches and schools, training people and oxen in ox-plowing, and bringing together communities to run successful cooperatives for grinding mills and importing grain from Arabs in Northern Sudan in time of droughts. He imagines and helps others build what they, including myself, often think are impossible in South Sudan.

Once, I suggested to Father Paride that he should be the Regional Minister of Agriculture. I will never forget his response.

Do I look like a dog?

Only dogs eat their own vomit. When I became a priest I vomited any ambition for politics and business. I can do more for my people as a simple priest.

We went on to witness the decline of the regional and national governments and the corruption of many good friends who entered politics. Bishop Paride was called upon to help his people in two more wars, both worse than the war that had just ended.

If the SPLA leaders had understood that Bishop Paride had no political ambition, maybe they would not have put him in prison for an indefinite period that might have been a life sentence. Thanks to international pressure he was released after about 100 days.

He was called many times to the U.S. and Europe as an independent representative to meet with officials in governments, the church, universities, and the United Nations. When I accompanied him in the U.S., I realized he was eager to return to help his people in the war zone. He accepted these international duties and used his recognition from these travels to pressure the SPLA military leaders to allow him and others to do their humanitarian, development, and pastoral work in a war zone where honest witnesses and peacemakers were not welcome and not safe.

I understood better the importance of his courage when a former Lost Boy approached me to ask if I really knew the man who was with me. He told when he was a young boy being taken to become a child soldier, he witnessed a famous SPLA commander slap Bishop Paride in the face. He and the other boys wanted to attack the commander, but the Bishop calmly stood his ground and the boys were released. This boy made it to America and was back in South Sudan building schools and sharing his good fortune. Several generations inspired by Bishop Paride and others like him are the hope for South Sudan.

Edmund Resor, March 24, 2017

South Sudan CRS 1974-1976, LWR 1976-1978, Sudan Country Director SCF/US 1986-1990
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A child taking care of her sibling in the village

Recommendation 6

Bishop Paride Taban has throughout his life and career worked tirelessly, unselfishly and with great dedication for peace in his native district of Kuron.

The Peace Village which was the brain-child of Bishop Taban is a source of inspiration to the whole of South Sudan and the rest of the world.

We, the undersigned, have visited his village, seen his work and taken part in the activities there. The Peace Village comprises a health-centre for everyone, schools for the children and youngsters, and a church which preaches ecumenism. Bishop Taban's most important mission is to bring together the fighting factions to create a basis for peace and dialogue, often putting his own life at risk. Anyone who is aware of the conflict in South Sudan is able to appreciate the great work Bishop Taban is doing.

We can think of no other person who deserves this prize more than Bishop Paride Taban – an apostle of peace in a very troubled area of the world.

Aase Pettersen
Lars Tomas Pettersen
Idun M. Johansen

Norway, March 2017

Recommendation 7

Bishop Paride Taban, is a long standing partner of AGEH. We met frequently, either in Cologne, while he was visiting Germany, in Nairobi or in South Sudan. AGEH supported Kuron Peace Village with a Civil Peace Worker, who worked there in the field of peace education with young people in and around Kuron for a couple of years. Looking at the recent history of Sudan and South Sudan the situation looked too often hopeless, at least when looking from the outside. Even in a situation where decades of war have crushed the people of South Sudan under heavy burdens, stealing the youth of the children, leaving many people traumatized, Bishop Paride Taban has always been a shining example for tireless dedication for peace and reconciliation. During times like these, where the people of South Sudan are passing through a new period of violence, experiencing forced expulsion and flight of parts of the population as well as famine, a charismatic personality like Bishop Paride Taban is one of the few outstanding leaders who show a visible and credible commitment for peace and reconciliation. There for AGEH is strongly supporting the idea of awarding the roosevelt prize to Bishop Paride Taban.

With kind regards and best wishes,

ARBEITSGEMEINSCHAFT FÜR ENTWICKLUNGSHILFE e. V.

Yours sincerely,

Ludger Reining
Hd. Dpt. International Personnel Cooperation

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Bishop Taban receives in 2013 the UN Sergio Vieira de Mello Prize for his efforts in promoting peace

Recommendation 8

As relatives of Tjeu Haumann, we have been involved in Bishop Paride Taban's peace-making work in South Sudan since 1990. Tjeu passed away some years ago but our family is still in regular contact with Bishop Paride Taban. When he is in Europe, he always tries to pay the family a visit. Bishop Paride Taban has spent his entire life as a priest in a war-torn country. His weapon in this war is "God's love": he is incapable of seeing a fellow human being as an enemy. Bishop Paride Taban continues to call on the international community on behalf of all those people in his country who no longer have a voice. Despite his advanced age, he still travels around to publicise the story of Kuron Peace Village because this is a place where people from different tribes live together in peace. In South Sudan, where human rights are violated on a daily basis, he wants to serve as an example to give people hope and support in their struggle for peace.

The Haumann family

The Netherlands, March 2017

Recommendation 9

Bishop Emeritus Paride Taban is an inveterate story-teller, a man who has long thought of where he has come from and why it might be important to himself and others that he share these. But story telling is a mystery, a parable to the end, as he smiles and almost everyone aaahs in eventual comprehension. They don't make them like they used to, I say. He makes no excuse of his profound sense of direction through Christianity, but rarely does anyone feel excluded, as he speaks in only the most tender and compassionate ways about all those who make up the world around him over the last eight decades.

Nothing that comes from him expresses any need for power, any lust to climb higher over the backs of others, instead he seems to draw the poor, the needy, the fearful ever closer, in their hundreds, in their broken-down ways, in their tattered state, not hiding his love and compassion, opening himself to their need for his love, compassion and understanding. While many of us shirk from proximity to poverty, with its smell, look and demand on our time and resources, Paride embraces it unhesitatingly.

He has unfailingly spoken up for the poor and their rights, living with them during the past war, a symbol of hope and light, speaking truth to power and even suffering imprisonment for his beliefs and actions. But he has also sought to show love in action – Holy Trinity Kuron Peace Village – to counter want by helping communities become more self-sufficient, to build confidence between people and reduce risks of violence. His 28 words and phrases are for me a mark of a larger-than-life man and I use a few of them to thank him. I love you, I miss you!

Ferdinand von Habsburg-Lothringen

Senior Advisor to the South Sudan Council of Churches
(Seconded by Swiss Government)

Recommendation 10



Bishop Paride Taban is well known for his freedom of speech about the situation in his country. During the different wars in Sudan and in South Sudan, he had to go jail because of his support to the prisoners: he distributed the Koran to Muslims and the Bible to Catholics!

After years, he decided to retire from his charge of bishop, because he wanted to react to the situation his country is in, and make an achievement to give hope to South Sudan and development (because for bishop Taban “Development is Peace!”).

Since that time, Friends of Sister Emmanuelle Belgium had the chance to support him in this fantastic project of the Peace Village: make a community with people from different ethnic groups, make them work together, produce enough to eat (even in this dramatic period for the other parts of the country), support education of the children, and live in peace in a country where this word has no sense.

The results are great, and communities can now live without fear: will the war kill my family or me, will I have enough to eat, and do my children have any future?

The work of bishop Paride Taban is not only words, it's facts that demonstrate that freedom can drive people to peace and development!

Christophe Etien
Director
Friends of Sister Emmanuelle

Pierre Gehod
Friends of Sister Emmanuelle
Chairperson Caritas Belgium

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Recommendation 11

My name is Marianne Schwab and I have known Bishop Taban since 2000. Father Mathew Haumann MHM who devoted all his time and energy to assisting the people of South Sudan introduced me to Bishop Paride Taban. From 2000 – 2006 I worked as a Lay Associate of the Mill Hill Missionaries (MHM) in the diocese of Kotido, Karamoja, north-east Uganda as a Coordinator for the diocesan development programme in Functional Adult Literacy and Income Generating Activities for pastoralists.

Kotido diocese is bordering the South Sudan and thus the diocese of Torit. On both sides of the border the area is inhabited by semi-nomadic tribes who are mainly cattle keepers and have in common their language and their strong traditional and cultural ties.

During that time I felt privileged to meet Bishop Paride from time to time together with Father Mathew in Nairobi or Kampala and shared their ideas and inspiring talks for peace in the war-torn South Sudan.

Thus I was interested in the Peace Village and I managed to travel with Bishop Paride to Kuron in 2006. Although only the basic structures had been put down at that time I became a witness of the ongoing process “peace through development for nomadic people”.

The local people in Kuron appreciated very much that Bishop Taban (and his group) stayed with them in peace, shared their daily life at the grassroot level and helped them to grow out of their poverty. I still remember their saying like “he is our bishop, he belongs to us”... but on the whole it was a slow process of transition.

Some parents were already convinced of the benefit of sending their children to school and in this way became good examples for the others. A number of women took part in the Village Development and farming programmes and they were encouraged to bring their sick children to the health centre and not longer to the traditional healer.

As well a peace programme for the nomadic youth was introduced in order to stop bad habits like cattle rustling. So far my impression in August 2006.

I have not lost contact with Bishop Paride and I'm aware that Kuron Peace Village meanwhile has become a role-model for peaceful social existence of different tribes and people in South Sudan.

Finally to me Bishop Paride Taban is a person who never has given up his mission despite all the setbacks during the longlasting war in the past and in the present. He really loves his country and his people.

In this way bishop Paride has become a real good shepherd for the South Sudanese people. A cornerstone, very much strengthened by a deep spirituality down to earth, a real peace maker.

Marianne Schwab
Stuttgart, 12/03/2017

Am Lehenweg 7
D – 70180 Stuttgart
Germany

Recommendation 12

When I reflect on my experiences with Bishop Paride Taban, the question that arises in my heart, if I were to describe his life and presence, is:

What does Love, Forgiveness and Courage look like?

I first met Bishop Taban in Torit, South Sudan, in May 1985, when I was asked by my Maryknoll Contemplative Community to do the research for having a Prayer Presence in his war-torn Diocese of Torit. Maryknoll Sister Ruth Greble from Juba drove me to Torit to meet the Bishop. When we arrived at the Bishop's compound, there was no sign of him. Then we heard some rattling under a nearby car, and found the Bishop on his back trying to repair the vehicle. Before the Bishop said anything, I knew I would want our Contemplative Community to be part of a diocese with his kind of leadership.

My companion, Sr. Madeline McHugh, and I often were invited to go with the Bishop when he traveled in the Diocese, and on one occasion he brought us to the outdoor prison, near Kapoeta, where he had been put temporarily by the Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army because he gave food to hungry soldiers from the North who were occupying the town of Torit. After he was released, the Bishop often went to see his Muslim-friends at the prison and brought them blankets and other useful items. We were allowed into the guarded area and it was touching to see how he was embraced and loved by the Muslim prisoners. One said to me: “The Bishop never forgets us!” Bishop Taban also initiated the Council of Churches in the Torit Diocese, which represented several different denominations of Christian Churches, and he had the courage to invite the Muslim Imam from the one Mosque in the Diocese. When relief food came into the Diocese, the Council of Churches' representatives became an efficient conduit for giving out relief food during the war years ~ and all in need were helped.

Sr. Madeline and I spent 18 years in South Sudan, and have come to love and admire the stature and courage of Bishop Taban. His witness has taught us that we need to remove the word “enemy” from our vocabulary, and that the Holy Spirit knows only two things: Love and the Cry for Love! The Bishop is not only a promoter of peace and courage, he *is* Peace and Courage! In the name of the Maryknoll Contemplative Community, it is an honor to recommend Bishop Paride Taban to receive the International Award of the Four Freedoms or the International Courage Award!

Sr. Theresa Baldini, M.M., for the Maryknoll Contemplative Community
March 7, 2017

Recommendation 13



THE DUTCH REGION OF THE MILL HILL MISSIONARIES

Oosterbeek, 10 March 2017

Fw: Recommendation of Bishop Paride Taban for Roosevelt Four Freedoms Award 2018.

The Mill Hill Missionaries' involvement with Bishop Paride Taban's work started in 1988. Mill Hill missionary Mathieu Haumann (1938-2006) worked in the war zone of South Sudan from 1988. Realising that the war had destroyed the country's civilian framework, Taban decided in 1989 to set up a reliable, independent religious framework that desperate South Sudanese people could fall back on. In places where there was a lack of government and where the catastrophic war held sway, an indefatigable Taban extended a helping hand to his people.

In 1989, Mill Hill became involved through Haumann in the foundation of the New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC), an ecumenical organisation uniting six churches. From the NSCC's earliest days, Father Haumann functioned as the secretary and right-hand man of the council's founder and first chairman, Bishop Paride Taban. The aim of the NSCC was to function as a Christian fraternity that transcended the boundaries of the different churches. And to bring about reconciliation by actually facilitating peace talks during the Second Sudanese Civil War (1983-2005). Taban: "A person survives not by killing enemies but by making friends."

A key success of the NSCC was the cessation of the internal tribal conflict among the Nuer in 1999. It was also Paride Taban who asked Tjeu Haumann in 2000 to look for support in the Netherlands for what was to become the very successful bridge-building project of the Dutch military engineering corps.

As peace diplomats, Taban and Haumann were an inseparable team for years in South Sudan and respected by all parties. Haumann: "At such negotiations, our little plane would be met by tough, heavily armed soldiers, but when Bishop Taban emerged as the first person from the plane, they would all jump to attention. The bishop would ignore the show of strength and walk straight up to the commander. They would embrace like old friends who haven't seen each other for ages."

As Mill Hill Missionaries, we have got to know Bishop Taban as an outstanding human being, untiring in his struggle in a forgotten corner where the suffering is unimaginable. He knows no fear. He constantly makes a superhuman effort to serve his people, without discrimination. He has crossed firing lines and survived ambushes, gunfire and bombardments, usually in the company of Father Haumann. Taban has always persevered towards achieving his dream of peace and freedom for his people.

With Kuron Peace Village, Bishop Taban has made a small-scale version of his dream come true. The Latin for 'bishop' is *pontifex*, or 'bridge-builder'. That is what Bishop Taban has done all his life and continues to do, both literally and figuratively. His work and his endeavour therefore deserve the highest possible international recognition, for his sake and through him for that of his beleaguered people. All good reasons for Mill Hill Missionaries to give its wholehearted support to his nomination for the International Four Freedoms Medal.

Martien van Leeuwen, MHM
Regional Father Superior, Mill Hill, the Netherlands
(from 1988 to 2001, Father Superior, Mill Hill Missionaries, Nairobi)

Johanahoeve 4
6861 WJ Oosterbeek,
The Netherlands

Recommendation 14



Parish of St. Peter Bergen L.
Presbytery, Kerkstraat 8
5854 AK Bergen L.,
The Netherlands
Telephone +31 (0)485-341285

Bergen, 3 March 2017

To whom it may concern,

The undersigned, the priest J.J.M. Janssen, has been employed in the parish of Saint Peter in Bergen (Limburg) since February 1998. In the course of my parish work, I met Father Tjeu Haumann, a Mill Hill missionary who worked in South Sudan. Father Haumann sought to improve the living standards of the people among whom he worked and it was through this that he met Bishop Paride Taban. Together they initiated and completed many projects. In particular, a bridge was built over a river by retired members of the Dutch military engineering corps, an amazing challenge that they completed successfully. Thus Bishop Paride Taban increasingly became a familiar figure in our parish community. Father Haumann passed away a few years ago but the bishop still visits our parish with some regularity and we support his current project, the Peace Village in Kuron. Bishop Paride Taban has reached a venerable age but he is still a driven man who puts an incredible amount of effort into his Peace Village and nothing is too much for him. He understands the art of engaging people internationally and getting them involved in his project, and he has the support of people in many countries. As he said when we last met, in October 2016: "The only place in South Sudan where there is peace is in Kuron!" Bishop Paride Taban is an exceptional man; he is guided by his faith and supported by his faith and by his love for the people. He is incredibly inspirational, not just in his Peace Village; he also inspires the people of Saint Peter's parish in Bergen. I wholeheartedly support the application for the nomination of Bishop Taban.

J.J.M. Janssen, priest



A group of young shepherds moving together with their cattle in the search for water and pasture

Recommendation 15



March 13, 2017

To Whom It May Concern
Re: Roosevelt Four Freedoms Award 2018

As Co-Presidents of Pax Christi International we are very happy to recommend Bishop Paride Taban for the Roosevelt Four Freedoms Award 2018. Pax Christi International has known the work and witness of Bishop Taban for many years. His tireless support for the people of Sudan and South Sudan throughout the long years of war has earned for him the unparalleled respect of communities throughout the country. His deep commitment to active nonviolence is demonstrated in the creativity of the Kuron Peace Village, where daily life and the challenging practice of building peace demonstrate Bishop Taban's deep commitment to the Four Freedoms, particularly Freedom from Fear.

Marie Dennis
Co-President

Bishop Kevin Dowling, C.S.S.R.
Co-President

Recommendation 16

Bishop Paride Taban has proven to be the pillar of the peace movement in South Sudan. He is a symbol of compassion, leadership and peace in a country devastated by a long period of war, with his humble, steadfast and undertaking character.

Strongly believing in the dignity of every human being he has never been afraid to confront the authorities with their injustice and at the same time to offer them new perspectives to do justice. As a Bishop he was present among his people offering help and consolation in the most difficult and violent situations and served as an example in his undaunted struggle for peace.

He united his people when there was divisiveness. He initiated the New Council of Churches of Sudan to bring the churches in South Sudan together. He realized his dream of a Peace Village in Kuron where different tribes live together, receive education and training, keep cattle and till the land. This endeavor of building trust among people, on the basis of shared values, basic security and economic development has deserved the name of a Peace Village for which he was awarded the Sergio Vieira de Mello peace prize by the United Nations in 2013.

Together with PAX he was one of the initiators of the Cross-border Peace and Sports Program in South Sudan, Uganda, Kenya enabling youth warriors of different conflicting tribes to meet in peacetime and deconstruct their conflicts and helping them to outline a better livelihood with less violence.

Paride Taban was leading in joint successful peace talks in South Sudan, and was asked regularly to contribute to peace processes in the region. Next to his national work he travelled extensively to successfully mobilize the international community to put pressure on key players in the governments of Sudan and South Sudan, and defended the right of his people to live in peace where the exploitation of oil was threatening their livelihoods. Where people recognized him as a bridge builder and a sower of peace, he also used the metaphor of a stinging bee. He stung his own people and the authorities to wake up and challenged them not to give in to greed and fiercely opposed the oil industry when it was hurting the interests of the people of South Sudan.

We were honored to have Bishop Paride Taban as our patron of the larger network of peace activists of Pax Christi International in the Horn of Africa. After recognition by and awards from several churches and the United Nations, Paride Taban is a strong representative of the Four Freedoms of Franklin Roosevelt. His efforts in building local and regional as well as national peace and security has always been based on his love for people regardless of their ethnic or religious background. While he was imprisoned by the Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army his fellow Muslim prisoners were so impressed by his love and kindness that they asked him to be baptized. He refused but offered them they could request him again but after they had been released and returned to their homes. He was convinced that true faith requires a free state of mind and body. Taban was never afraid to address his leaders and he operated often as a skilled diplomat to convey his message of tolerance and justice.

We have witnessed and experienced that Mgr. Paride Taban has been a beacon of hope in the often bloody and daunting history of South Sudan. International recognition will contribute further to the outreach of his moral voice of brother- and sisterhood, of justice and peace and of self-reliance.

Peace for Taban is not only a state of mind and heart, but a verb. Every morning he reminds himself of 20 words that sum up his unique spirituality for peace and reconciliation: **Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Compassion, Sympathy, Kindness, Truthfulness, Gentleness, Self-control, Humility, Forgiveness, Poverty, Mercy, Friendship, Trust, Unity, Purity, Faith, Hope.** And eight central verbs which he shares with all-comers: *I love you, I miss you, thank you, I forgive, we forget, together, I am wrong, I am sorry.* His spirituality has never been confined to words, but to be acted out. Peace and reconciliation are not mere techniques to be learned; they are the result of transformation of individuals and communities.

Jan Gruiters
PAX Director

Edwin Ruigrok
Identity and church relations adviser

Nico Plooijer
Horn of Africa program manager

Sara Ketelaar
Cross-border peace program manager

March 17, 2017

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PAX is member of Pax Christi International



Recommendation 17

To meet Bishop Paride Taban is to immediately understand that there is still so much to be hopeful about in this world. As an individual, when you are in his presence, you can't help but find comfort in his warmth, be infected by his good humour, and be fascinated to hear of his incredible life. He radiates a deep sense of approachedness, compassion, humility. When you meet other individuals who have had the good fortune to meet him in person, you share a sense of fondness for the connection he shares with his fellow human beings. And it is when you step away and view the bigger picture that you really begin to understand what he means to the people of South Sudan.

Beneath his good humour and personable nature lies a committed discipline and solid determination. He will tell you of this daily exercise routine, accompanied by his mantra of 28 words which provide guidance for us all irrespective of religion or culture. He will openly share stories and parables which reveal his wisdom and experience; truth and sincerity are his hallmark. He lovingly cherishes simplicity as the root of his dignity.

It is hard to talk about peace in South Sudan without referring to him as a key point of reference, providing wise counsel and vision when others may feel despair and hopelessness. Bishop Paride is acutely aware of his responsibility to his people and has always taken his role extremely seriously. Beyond his passion and deep belief that a peaceful way is possible, he is a natural leader, and stands firm for his beliefs.

His achievements are far too numerous to write in half a page, but we list some key points below. The same themes emerge throughout. His passionate commitment to alleviating suffering and poverty, his fearlessness in speaking truth to power and providing counsel to leaders, his willingness to give himself to difficult yet critical roles in numerous peace processes, his ability to travel around the world at the call of his people to spread the word about the situation in South Sudan and meet them in peace. Above all, the thing he cherishes the most is to be among the people. He carries them in his heart, and is eternally available for them. Despite his great age, he will always rise to dance with them. His magnanimous approach enshrines that of a genuine peacemaker – he walks full heartedly with victims, but also reaches out to perpetrators in forgiveness.

Some say Bishop Paride is perhaps one of the few South Sudanese alive that can still remember a time of peace. He continues to build a powerful and compelling legacy, living his ideals and sharing great wisdom, and inspiring us all with pure messages of love and peace.

- Bishop Paride retired in 2004 to pursue a vision which became Holy Trinity Peace Village Kuron, a key model of peace in South Sudan. He continues to work hard for Kuron, and is regularly called upon to play critical roles as a peace leader or mediator for South Sudan.
- During the war for independence, from 1983 till 2005, Bishop Taban played a major role in negotiating peace between government armed forces and those who were called rebels.

- Bishop Paride chaired the mediation of the agreement on a cessation of hostility between the government of the Republic of South Sudan and South Sudan Democratic movement/ Defense army, cobra faction in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 30th January 2014.
- Bishop Paride is part of the nine (9) bishops who signed to the pastoral message of the catholic bishops of South Sudan to the faithful and the people of South Sudan Entitled “**A voice cries in the wilderness**”. Dated 23rd Feb. 2017
- Bishop Paride's 28 words for building peace, for peaceful co-existence which he does not miss saying everyday: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Compassion, Sympathy, Kindness, Truthfulness, Gentleness, Self-control Humility, Poverty, Forgiveness, Mercy, Friendship, Trust, Unity, Purity, Faith, Hope. I love you; I miss you; Thank you; I forgive; we forget; Together; I am wrong; I am sorry.

Kind regards and best wishes for a successful Roosevelt Four Freedoms Award 2018.

Rosie Crowther
Christian Aid Country Manager

Gabriel Moris Moi
Tackling Violence and Building peace Programme Officer

Natalia Chan
Peacebuilding and Advocacy adviser

Christian Aid South Sudan Programme
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March 10, 2017

Recommendation 18

I have had the privilege to know Bishop Paride Taban, Bishop emeritus of the Diocese of Torit, South Sudan, for more than 25 years. This period coincided with the second civil war in Sudan, and the years following the peace agreement and separation of South Sudan from the north, in 2011. The Bishop is a man completely dedicated to the needs of his people and even during the worst years of the conflict, he lived in his diocese in the most rudimentary conditions in solidarity with the ordinary people. He put his own life at risk on numerous occasions, travelling through war zones and most spectacularly, by organising a relief convoy to the besieged town of Torit, where people were dying of starvation.

The Bishop realised that for a sustainable peace to be achieved in South Sudan, more would be needed than just a ceasefire and an end to fighting. Two generations of South Sudanese had grown up surrounded by conflict and had no idea how to live in a peaceful and stable society. After much research locally and globally, Bishop Taban decided to establish a Peace Village, at Kuron, a small village in a remote area in Eastern Equatoria. The peace village would bring together people from across the whole of South Sudan, to a place where they would be isolated from outside influences and where they would learn how to live alongside other people who have a different cultural background. Because of South Sudan's relative isolation for more than 60 years, inter-cultural and inter-ethnic rivalry is rife, something which is currently being exploited by the war-lords who have been encouraging violence since December 2013.

Bishop Taban committed himself fully to reconciling communities and the nation and was not afraid to put himself at great personal risk for the good of all of the people of South Sudan. At a time when South Sudan is in a downward spiral of internecine conflict which continues despite numerous interventions by external bodies, it is the Sudanese Church leaders who are speaking out most forcibly about the need for an end to the fighting. The Southern Sudanese of all tribes and beliefs are fortunate to have Bp Paride Taban as their ambassador, working tirelessly and selflessly for peace, justice and reconciliation. No-one more deserves consideration for the Roosevelt Four Freedoms award than Bishop Taban, a man who has dedicated his life to addressing the needs of marginalised and forgotten people who for decades have been oppressed by the very authorities who should have been protecting them.

Rob Rees

Mr Rees first met Bp Taban in 1986, through his role as Programme Officer for Sudan for CAFOD and worked together with him and other personnel in his diocese continuously the next 25 years.

Recommendation 19

By Hennie Schuurs, retired captain of the Royal Netherlands Army, Engineer Regiment

Never have I met such an intrepid and energetic church leader as Bishop Paride Taban. He is an indefatigable man who operates often in life-threatening conditions in a dark corner of the world, a place where the cameras never come. His lifelong ambition has been to do good for his long-suffering people, devoid of any sense of fear, following the path of peace and freedom. That is why the man and his people deserve special international recognition.

In 1999, our Regimental Aide-de-camp of the Engineer Regiment was approached during a commemoration of the dead by Father Mathieu Haumann (Mill Hill Missionaries). Father Haumann was working in the war zone of South Sudan in the diocese of Torit, an area the size of the Netherlands where all the infrastructure had been destroyed. Knowing that building military bridges, such as Bailey bridges, is one of the important military activities of the Engineer Regiment, Haumann asked whether the Regiment could find military engineers to build a bridge in South Sudan for Paride Taban, the bishop of Torit.

Three military engineers were found who were willing to do this. The bridge had to be built over the Kuron River in the fairly inaccessible far eastern part of the diocese, close to the border with Ethiopia.

Paride's wish was to build bridges, both literally and figuratively, to connect people in villages and the tribes. In doing so, he wanted to give local people hope and confidence in peace and to let refugees return to their region. We built the first bridge in 2000. By then, the bishop was already busy with the next bridge project, a bridge over the Aswa River, near Nimule to the south of the capital, Juba.

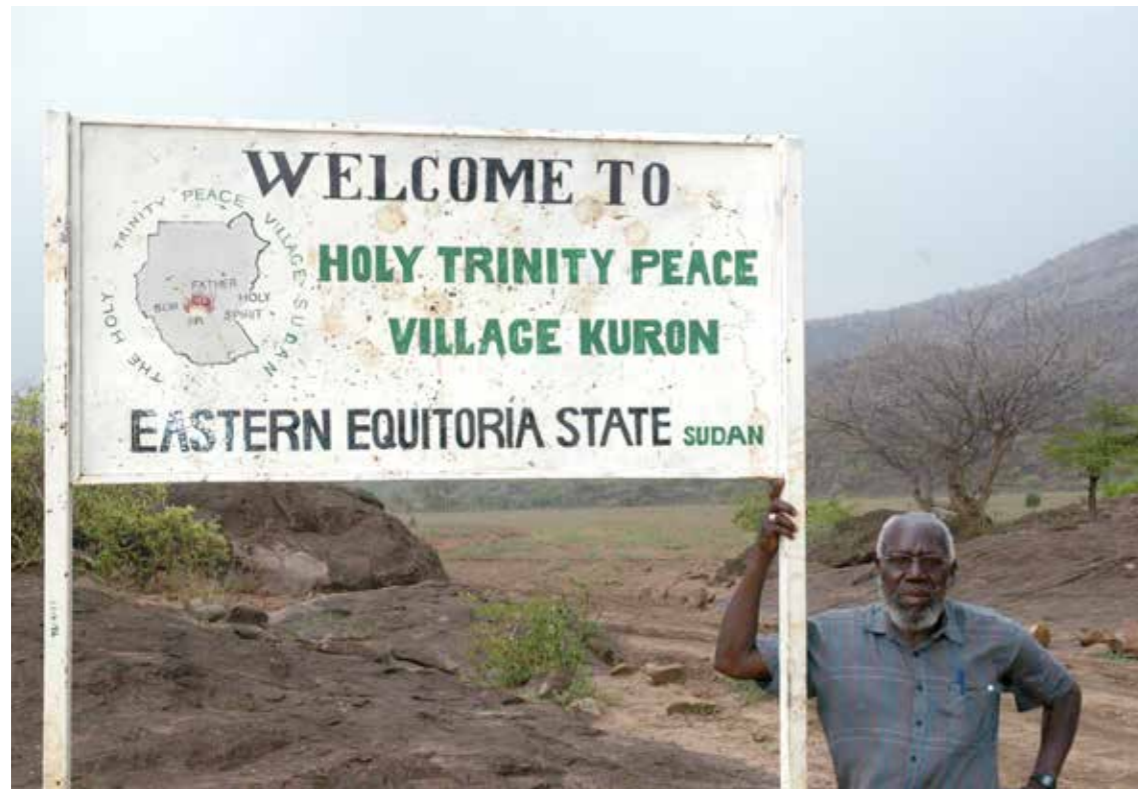
The war flared up around that time but the preparations for Nimule just continued, despite the fighting and bombardments. Construction was able to start in early 2002. As the builders, we had said that it would have to be safe before we left for Sudan.

When we arrived at the site of the bridge, we found out that the bishop is a very practical man. He had arranged robust security for us through some military contacts: an infantry company had dug itself in on the Sudan side along with two anti-aircraft guns. On the other side were two armoured vehicles manned by soldiers from the Ugandan army.

They were just a small part of the 1500 (!!!) soldiers who were tasked with guaranteeing our safety on that side. They too had an anti-aircraft gun. Our camp was also properly set up and included an air-raid shelter for three people. Paride had arranged all of this. This bridge is used a great deal by NGOs for aid transport and for bringing back refugees from Uganda. We have built twelve bridges in total for the church leader/contractor/bridge-builder Bishop Paride.

Boxtel, 6 March 2017.

Captain, Retired
Engineer Regiment
Purcellstraat 36
5283 GZ Boxtel.



Bishop Paride Taban standing next to a signboard of Kuron Peace Village situated in the vast and remote Kauto payam in South Sudan

Recommendation 20

Despite all the prevailing conflict in South Sudan, there is an oasis of tranquility in Eastern Equatoria, the Holy Trinity Peace Village Kuron, founded in 2000 by Bishop Paride Taban. Comprising some 10 square kilometers on land donated by local community leaders, the Kuron Peace Village boasts a health clinic, schools, vocational programs, meeting facilities, prototype livelihoods activities, and, most important of all, entrenched mechanisms to mediate disputes peacefully. To conceive of and create such a peaceful sanctuary in South Sudan, one must be relentless, inspiring, and fearless, perfect adjectives for Bishop Paride.

Thousands of South Sudanese know and love the Bishop for his tireless work over the past five decades to feed the hungry, reconcile parties in conflict, and teach his people how to become independent and spiritually whole during troubled times. Kuron Peace Village embodies this half century of the Bishop's labor.

Catholic Relief Services is honored to support the Peace Village in Kuron and privileged to partner with the Bishop and his staff. Our hope is that the Kuron model of peaceful living and calm, respectful mediation spreads to other communities in South Sudan.

Catholic Relief Services

Jerry Farrell | Country Representative, Juba, South Sudan |
email: Jerome.farrell@crs.org | Tel: +211 922 223 406 and +211 955 144 888

Recommendation 21

In South Sudan Bishop Emeritus Paride Taban is an iconic figure. He is known and accepted by all tribes and all factions in this fragmented and polarised nation. He lives and breathes peace and reconciliation, and is the first name on everybody's lips when conflicts arise and a trusted figure is needed to intervene.

Bishop Paride's life experience has taught him to eschew tribalism and division. From his childhood in a village which had a national sawmill and thus had people from all over the country living and working together, through his education at a national seminary, to his life as a priest and bishop, his work during the civil wars in Sudan and South Sudan, his time spent at a peace village in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and his eventual retirement from his official capacity as diocesan bishop in order to found his own Holy Trinity Peace Village in the remote and conflict-ridden area of Kuron in South Sudan, he has devoted himself to peace and reconciliation.

His life is too full to chronicle in a short nomination, but perhaps a few episodes are worth mentioning. He is an intensely practical man, an agriculturalist and mechanic who drives tractors and lorries. He has been threatened, arrested and harassed by both sides in the earlier conflicts in Sudan. After being released after 100 days of detention and mistreatment by the Sudan People's Liberation Army, his first act was to send food to his former captors, remarking as Jesus did, "They do not know what they are doing". He led a relief convoy to his diocesan town of Torit which took 30 days to cover less than 200 km and which was under fire every single day. He buried Christians and Muslims alike. He was one of very few bishops who continued travelling throughout the war zone, taking care of the people of most of the dioceses, not just his own. Nearly 20 years ago he participated in a trauma healing workshop with his fellow bishops and to this day he faithfully performs the physical exercises which he learned in that workshop; aged over 80 he is able to do push-ups and other exercises which people many years his junior cannot manage. He is a wise elder who often tells African stories as parables to illustrate his points. He is completely selfless with his time and resources.

Bishop Paride has a simple spirituality, with 28 "words" which he repeats every day: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Compassion, Sympathy, Kindness, Truthfulness, Gentleness, Self-control, Humility, Poverty, Forgiveness, Mercy, Friendship, Trust, Unity, Purity, Faith, Hope, I love you, I miss you, Thank you, I forgive, We forget, Together, I am wrong, I am sorry. Discerning where he is weak each day he concentrates his prayers and his actions on improving that particular aspect. Many of those whose lives have been touched by the bishop have benefited from this simple insight.

Bishop Paride has no need for any awards, and would not covet them. While not seeking recognition, he is well known worldwide, and indeed he finds the constant calls for international travel a distraction from his work in South Sudan. However if an award can further the work of the peace village and help his suffering brothers and sisters on the ground, he would accept it with the same humility with which he accepts everything that comes his way, whether good or bad.

by John Ashworth – 3rd April 2017

*John Ashworth has worked with the church in Sudan and South Sudan for 34 years and has known and worked with Bishop Paride during most of that period, most recently as an advisor to the Holy Trinity Peace Village, Kuron. John is the author of *The Voice of the Voiceless: The Role of the Church in the Sudanese Civil War 1983-2005*, in which Bishop Paride features prominently.*



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