

## THE MESSAGE OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

DON ÁNGEL FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME

# EASTER IN PALABEK

**Don Bosco has arrived in the refugee camp of Palabek, Uganda. This is good news of the RESURRECTION OF THE LORD.**

Yes, my dear friends! It is true. Don Bosco has arrived in Palabek – through his sons, the Salesians of Don Bosco, the SDBs. I write to you to tell you this so that whoever you may be, you may rejoice over this eminently human news. Without a doubt, those who comprise Don Bosco's Family and who are living his charism recognize immediately how much this news speaks to them of the Gospel and the Salesian way. It also brings much to those who simply feel close to all that is done for the good of children, teenagers, and young adults through this great "tree" which is Don Bosco's Salesian Family, composed of 31 different, officially recognized groups spread throughout the world.

Living all over northern Uganda are about 1,200,000 refugees, mostly from South Sudan. The first refugees arrived in the camp back in March 2016. It is 77 km/48 miles from Gulu, the largest city of northern Uganda, and 340 km/211 miles from Kampala, Uganda's capital.

Knowing of this place, the Salesian provincial of the Africa-Great Lakes Province visited there and spoke to me of it. I asked a member of our mission team to go there to check out the possibility of setting up a Salesian presence in that place, since there are displaced children, teens, and young adults there – most certainly a place for Don Bosco's sons. He did so.

Today there are around 36,000 refugees in this camp, 86% of whom are women, children, and a huge number of teens. The elderly are very few. I am taking this opportunity now to provide evidence yet again that the women – and, in this case, the majority of them are moms – bear the greatest burden in their struggles and sacrifices. Yet it is they who in the daily realities of life "save" their children. We offer great thanks to these women and mothers. It fills us with happiness to be able to be there to tend to their sons and daughters.

**We realized right from the start that nursery schools, grade schools, technical schools, oratories, and Salesian youth centers would be necessary. We will see what steps we can take now, and then later how other persons and institutions can help; but we shall not look to withdraw.**

On January 31 the SDBs "pitched their tents" in Palabek Camp. Father Arasu animates the community. With him are three other SDBs – all missionaries – coming from Venezuela and India. Another three young African SDBs are getting ready to become part of this new presence in September.

Someone might very well ask whether we have "landed" with some mega-construction. No – we have simply begun living among them and with them, living the same life they do – putting up with the same intense heat and scarcity of material goods. We shall move forward from here, finding the way to help improve the situation, especially where education is concerned – to prepare the

children, the teens, and the young adults for life. The great majority of them are Christians, and we are accompanying them along their faith journey.

We realized right from the start that nursery schools, grade schools, technical schools, oratories, and Salesian youth centers would be necessary. We will see what steps we can take now, and then later how other persons and institutions can help; but we shall not look to withdraw.

We are already beginning to seek material aid to animate the liturgical celebrations of the various communities that will be formed. We cannot forget that the 36,000 persons living in the Palabek Camp greatly outnumber those who live in hundreds of towns or little cities in many places around the world. It is truly a moveable city – in tents. We will prepare catechists to animate and accompany these various Christian communities. We will look for and prepare young people who can animate various Salesian oratories because, happily, life continues, and the young need to be filled with joy and hope and have a reason to live each day. We must also think of how to form and prepare others to be teachers for the schools and instructors for the vocational and technology shops. Thank God, we are not alone in this, and some lay people also are beginning to get involved in this mission.

We know that together, little by little, we can do much to give a dignified life to so many thousands of displaced persons. We are also aware that we are not alone in this and that there are hundreds of persons who, once they receive news about it and become aware of it, will feel the desire to join in this effort on-site or to collaborate from afar.

That is why I share this with you and why I said at the start that Don Bosco has arrived at Palabek in Uganda by means of his SDB Salesians, and that the Lord Jesus has risen also among the displaced peoples of Palabek. This is so because the “castoffs” of this world (“cast off” by our acts of violence and evil deeds) continue to feel that they are beloved by our God, who cries out for us to take steps, in thousands of ways, to construct the one human civilization which alone is worthy of the name. This civilization is both possible and perduring: the civilization of human fraternity that can be built only on justice and the right everyone has to a dignified life.

May smiles not disappear from Palabek. Blessed Easter of the Resurrection to all.

