

IFOR STATEMENT on COLONIALISM and AFRICA

Juba Council, 20 November 2022

Founded in response to the horrors of war in Europe, the International Fellowship Of Reconciliation has taken a consistent stance against war and its preparation throughout its history. IFOR members share a vision of a world where conflicts are resolved through nonviolent means, where systems that foster fear and hatred are dismantled, and where justice is sought as a basis for peace

Perceiving the need for healing and reconciliation in the world, the founders of IFOR formulated a vision of the human community based upon the belief that love in action has the power to transform unjust political, social, and economic structures

Having been established in 1914 and now with 71 branches, groups and affiliates in 48 countries on all continents, IFOR exists across spiritual and geographical boundaries. We therefore share the shame and the sinfulness of our European predecessors over the brutal colonization of Africa and all the evils that followed. And we offer our sincere, heartfelt and prayerful acknowledgment of these failures which are part of us, not just of some distant 'them'.

We stand today on African soil here in Juba, South Sudan as peacemakers, seeking forgiveness and extending a hand of reconciliation. We seek to deepen our learning and response to the depths of colonialism, neocolonialism and all the violent effects brought about by these imperial systems. We are aware that for many on all sides, it can be difficult to look at these effects, to listen carefully to one another, and to empower those most affected to speak up. It is not easy to hold onto the depths of cruelty which the ideologies of racism and white supremacy have marked our cultures, divided our communities, and caused war and genocide. Yet as we feel the embrace of our hosts from the youngest country on the planet, the ideal of reconciliation feels more tangible and possible to us than ever before.

Our coming to Africa today, for the first time as a Council on this continent, is a major historic symbolic step of our acknowledgment and commitment to the rebuilding of healthy cooperative relationships between our sisters and brothers from Africa and the rest of our International. Our choice to hold the Council on African soil, and our actual arrival on this hospitable land, is no accident. No true internationalism can be built without the inclusion of all peoples of our rainbow earth.

Remembering and acknowledging the errors of the past also means a social call to name the injustice and to ensure that it is not repeated. Memories therefore shine lights on injustices, making them actionable. Our desire for reconciliation must not skip the task of social reparation and obscures the continuities of racism and white supremacy.

We are fully cognizant that this is just a step, perhaps a small initial step, but a right step into the journey of full trust, respect and mutual co-existence between the West, the East, and the African continent. This symbolic stage of action should inspire IFOR to develop a consensual program for future action, to translate our common will and commitment here into concrete future collaborations. In the context of the sins of our forefathers, and the hopes and dreams of all of us today as envisioned in our meetings and decisions made here, we believe these steps taken together will build a better fellowship both within our organization and in the communities we touch.