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## South Sudan starts talking, thanks to Radio Miraya 1



**JUBA (South Sudan) – Miraya is a 24 hour, 7 day a week radio** operated by the United Nations Mission in Sudan in partnership with [Fondation Hirondelle](#), a Swiss non-governmental organization. **Launched on June 30, 2006**, Miraya has grown to an organization of more than **100 national staff members** (journalists, presenters, technicians and support staff) who have been recruited from all over Sudan and trained in-house. **Afronline’s report from Juba.**

“I thought a microphone was better than a gun to continue the liberation”. **David’s** explanation is simple and convincing. A former captain of the **Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA**, an ex-guerilla force that now governs South Sudan), he now **conducts *Face to Face*, a popular radio talk-show that hosts political and civil society personalities.**

We are in one of the many Eritrean restaurants in **Juba** and the girl sitting next to us recognises him instantly from his voice. It is especially young people who need a free and open debate about the future of their country. For a country that has become the youngest African state after the **referendum held in January sanctioned the birth of independent South Sudan**, it is a future that still needs to be build.

“Many of our journalists are former child soldiers and even those who managed to avoid such a fate have pasts which have been marked by war,” says **Zoran Culafic, news editor of Miraya**, the radio which has given David and many other young South Sudanese journalists a voice. Miraya emerged from a collaboration between the **United Nations mission in Sudan (UNMIS)** and **Fondation Hirondelle**, a Swiss non governmental organisation (NGO) that builds and supports quality media in crisis zones and post-conflict situations.

**Every morning at 8.30, Zoran directs the editorial meeting discreetly, listening to journalists rather than imposing his point of view.** “If you point them in the right the direction they provide the resources,” he says, speaking about the reporters, “they can do this job better than anyone else because they know the people, the places, the problems”. **The aim is to make Miraya a point of reference for the growth of the civil society** which South Sudan is desperately in need of. That is why Miraya doesn’t only host political debates but also tries to give voice to a population that wants to live again after twenty two years of war.

**Lubna conducts Baytna (“Our home”)**, a programme in which she tries to give answers to the more concrete **problems of family and domestic life.** “During the last episode,” she explains, “we talked about eating a balanced diet with limited resources. Listeners were given a chance to call in and have

their say and many asked questions which we attempted to give concrete answers to.”

**South Sudan needs this as well as to re-create the fabric of its past and its culture.** Martin is a tall, smiling boy. He is reviving the region’s traditional music by inviting artists and groups to play in Miraya’s studios. “People are enthusiastic,” he tells me with pride, “they have asked us to make some CDs with the music we record and play on air”.

Naturally, however, it is current events that steals the scene in South Sudan at the moment. The tumultuous political affairs of the country have an immediate impact on the life of its eight million citizens. **One of the most burning issues of the moment is the return of the refugees who escaped to the North during the war.** I head towards Juba’s river port with **Emmanuel**, a large 34 year old who spent half of his life as a refugee in Arizona and working at a petrol station. In America Emmanuel studied and today shares his time between Miraya and the fields that he managed to convince his tribal leader to allocate to him and which he farms.

Once we reach the port, we see that two large boats carrying hundreds of people have just arrived, the people are now crowded on the banks of the Nile waiting to board trucks that will take them to their country of origin. Almost all of them are from Torit, the same region that Emmanuel is from. He knows many of them, some he has not seen for twenty years but the ties have not been lost. I stop to talk to a middle-aged man, **Santino**. “I ran away in 1986, I was only 16 years old,” he says, “I lived in a camp in Khartoum for more than twenty years and am happy I can now go back. **The real problem is for our children:** they are not used to the environment, to malaria, it will take them a while to adapt”. Shortly after, when we move away, Emmanuel smiles and says: “you know that the man you spoke to used to be a great goalkeeper? When we played as children, **his nickname was ‘Magnet’**”.

It seems like a story from a long time ago. **Today, ‘Magnet’ doesn’t have a job, a home or the hope of a stable future.** He is exhausted after a gruelling, ninety day journey. The conditions at the port of Juba are not good. There is no food and drinking water only arrived yesterday. People sleep outdoors and there are mosquitoes everywhere. The presence of humanitarian organisations, which in the city are everywhere, here is relinquished to a faded UNICEF tent and a couple of staff members from the IOM, the organisation which, together with the government, is managing the repatriations.

Emmanuel speaks to young people, the elderly and women, asking them to talk about their experiences. At first it isn’t easy, the situation is tense and the people look at us with expressions of expectation, nervousness and indifference. I am aware that **without Emmanuel this would be an off-limits area for a foreign journalist.** In a few minutes he is able to ensure that our presence is accepted, and many tell us their story. “They know that it is important to make the condition they live in known to others. For them, it is the only way to have a voice and receive help”.

After all, this is what **Radio Miraya** is. **The voice of a “newborn” state that already speaks many languages.** There is, of course, the language of suffering and need, but also the language of redemption, of freedom gained through hardship and the determination to take back the many years that were stolen by war and building a different future.

*By Roberto Sinovia – Afronline.org*