

Eastern Upper Nile Field

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Formerly part of the Greater Upper Nile Field, the Eastern Upper Nile Field was organized in 2020. It is currently part of the South Sudan Attached Territory in the East-Central Africa Division of Seventh-day Adventists.

The territory of the Eastern Upper Nile Field includes the following states in the country of South Sudan: eastern part of Upper Nile, eastern part of Jonglei, and the Pugnodo, Kule, Tierkidi, Ngueniyel, Gure Shambolle, Tongo, Tsore, Charcoale, and South Sudanese's refugee camps in Ethiopia.

Statistics, as of June 30, 2020: churches 24, membership 10,349, population 1,711,077!¹

Organization

The Eastern Upper Nile Field (EUNF) was originally part of the Greater Upper Nile Field. Due to the incessant civil war in South Sudan, the people of Upper Nile were scattered everywhere in and outside South Sudan. This region of South Sudan experienced and continues to experience, the worst displacement. It is estimated that 321,342 South Sudanese have taken refuge in Ethiopia. At the end of June 2020, Ethiopia hosted 342,765 South Sudanese refugees of whom 319,130 were sheltered in seven camps in the Gambella regional state.²

This rampant displacement has affected the members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as well. It has made it extremely difficult for pastors to nurture the members of the Eastern Upper Nile. Thus, in March 2018, the administrative committee of the South Sudan Attached Territory (SSAT), at the recommendation of Greater Upper Nile Field,³ voted to recommend to the East-Central Africa Division (ECD) that the Eastern Upper Nile be organized into a station under SSAT administration.⁴ When Eastern Upper Nile was organized into a station, the membership was 5,540. The station grew very fast, so that by November 2018 the total membership had almost doubled. This was indicative of the potential for growth of the Church in Eastern Upper Nile and in the camps in Ethiopia.⁵ Because of the phenomenal growth, in November 2018, the SSAT executive committee recommended to ECD the change of status from a station to a field.⁶

Evaluation for Field Status

In response to the request from SSAT to organize the Eastern Upper Nile Station (EUNS) into a field, the ECD Executive Committee appointed an evaluation commission led by Dr. Joel Okindo—one of the assistants to Dr.

Blasious Ruguri, the ECD president—as the commissioner; Elder Dan Agwena, secretary; and Pastor Temesgan Bulti, accompanied by the three officers of SSAT, and they went to Gambela.⁷

The team interviewed the station leaders, elders, members, and station staff. The interview process was a great success and much was learned from the process.⁸ It was then concluded that creating the new field would provide a strategic advantage for the fulfillment of the mission of the Church in South Sudan.⁹ Subsequently, at the yearend ECD Executive Committee meeting in 2019, ECD accepted the report of the commission that favored the organization of EUNS to a field, and it was voted (ECD2019-083).¹⁰ However, due to the coronavirus pandemic, it was not organized until October 2020.

Territory and Statistics

In the 2018 meeting of the ECD Executive Committee, it was voted to create the Eastern Upper Nile Station in Gambela to take care of SSAT members displaced in Ethiopian refugee camps and those in the Eastern Upper Nile regions of Maiwut, Nasir, and Akobo.¹¹ Consequently, the Ethiopia Union Mission Executive Committee also voted to permit the operation of the Eastern Upper Nile Station in its territory in addition to the Gambela Field that reports to the Ethiopia Union.¹² The creation of the Eastern Upper Nile Station was a great catalyst for church growth as the administration of the church was moved to nurture the members.

Eventually, by the end of the fourth quarter of 2019, the field had grown to a total membership of 9,260, and there were 24 organized churches and nine companies. The total number of worshippers in the local congregations was 12,757.¹³ At the end of the fourth quarter of 2020, the field further grew to a total membership of 10,987, there were 35 organized churches and 38 companies.¹⁴ There has been a steady growth since the Ethiopia Refugee Camps (ERC) were organized in 2014 under the Greater Upper Nile Field. In 2015 its membership was 2,108, in 2016 it grew to 2,741, and in the years 2017-2018 EUNS had reached 3,700 members; a year and a half after the organization it had grown to 8,515 members. This is a 79 percent growth rate.¹⁵

South Sudan had 32 states when EUNS was organized. The station's territory was composed of four of the 32 states: Maiwut, Latjor, Bieh, and Akoba states, and the South Sudanese Refugee camps in Ethiopia. These states border Ethiopia. They are part of the territory occupied by South Sudanese. Now South Sudan has reverted to the previous ten states. However, EUNF territory still covers these four former states, plus some parts of northeastern Jongolei.¹⁶

Field Leadership in Gambella, Ethiopia

The first constituency session was held on November 16-17, 2020, under the South Sudan Attached Territory led by Dr. Clement Joseph Arkangelo Mawa, the president of SSAT; Pastor Daniel Ogwok, the executive secretary; and Elder Dani Harelimana, the treasurer. The field was organized in Gambella, Ethiopia, under the leadership of

Pastor James Tut Kuon, the field president; Pastor Lam Duop Lam; executive secretary; and Elder John Gai Mathat, the field treasurer.¹⁷

The field headquarters is currently in Gambella, Ethiopia. It is anticipated that when peace is realized the headquarters will be moved to Nasir where the Church has land and property. The field currently has a total of 43 workers, composed of four ordained ministers, two with a ministerial license, two with a commissioned ministerial license, one with a missionary license, 18 contract workers, 15 part-time contract workers, and one volunteer.¹⁸

Schools

The field operates five primary schools in nine districts. Some of these schools operate in temporary structures built with mud walls and plastic/canvas roofs, while some have iron roof structures. Currently, none of these primary schools is in a permanent structure.¹⁹

Significant Events

On December 20, 2020, the first constituency meeting of EUNF organized three districts. These are Nyirol District in western Akoba, Jekow District, and Ulang District. Two licensed workers were ordained to the gospel ministry during the organization of the Eastern Upper Nile into a field.²⁰ EUNF has completed the registration of 8,272 members in the Adventist Church Management System (ACMS).²¹

Mission and Strategic Plan of the Eastern Upper Nile Field

EUNF territory follows the SSAT and ECD mission statement: "Make disciples of Jesus Christ who live as His loving witnesses and proclaim to all people the everlasting gospel of the Three Angels' Message in preparation for His soon return (Matt. 28:18-20, Acts 1:8, Rev. 14:6-12)." The field fulfills its mission statement through various activities that include training district pastors at all levels and increasing the work force in order to have adequate regular workers. It encourages Total Member Involvement (TMI) throughout the territory, at least once a year, in order to increase membership by not less than 50 percent, with emphasis on discipleship as the core of its mission. EUNF endeavors to organize churches at district levels, create retention and nurture committees in all districts and churches, introduce prayer ministry in all churches throughout the field territory, and conduct camp meetings in all districts.²²

Leaders of the Eastern Upper Nile Station (2018-2020)

James Tut Kuon (president), Michael Yei Banak (secretary), Keach Long Wech (accountant).

Officers of the Eastern Upper Nile Field (2020-present)

James Tut Kuon (president), Lam Duop Lam (executive secretary), John Gai Mathat (treasurer).

SOURCES

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NOTES

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