

Press release: Friday Oct. 12, 2007

820 words approx.

Contacts:

Riette Pranger (860) 742-1954

Gabriel Bol Deng (315) 396-4636

For photographs contact

David Morse (860) 429-6803

"Lost Boy" tells of visit to South Sudan

Connecticut audiences will soon have an opportunity to learn first-hand about the connections between Darfur, the war-ravaged region in western Sudan, and today's turmoil in South Sudan. Gabriel Bol Deng, who at the age of ten barely escaped with his life when his village was attacked twenty years ago, will speak before several groups October 18 – 22. His schedule is given below.

Deng, one of the so-called "Lost Boys" of Sudan, now an American citizen, is a man with a mission that grew directly from his experience as a refugee. Last May he returned to his native Dinka village for the first time in twenty years, hoping to find one or both of his parents alive. It was a bittersweet encounter. Deng was stunned at the level of poverty he encountered, and came away more determined than ever to build a school for the village and to provide it with clean water.

Deng was nine or ten when his village came under attack by militiamen on horseback sponsored by the central Government in Khartoum. He was caring for his father's cattle at the time. After searching in vain for his parents in the burning rubble, he fled on foot. He was among some 40,000 refugees who walked for months until they reached Ethiopia. Many died along the way, of hunger or thirst, or drowned in rivers, or were eaten by lions or hyenas. It was at the camp in Ethiopia that Deng attended school for the first time at the age of twelve or thirteen. School made a powerful impression on him.

He had completed first grade and was about to begin second grade in 1991 when the Ethiopian government fell to rebels armed by Khartoum. The camp was attacked. The young refugees were driven across the river – many drowning – and forced to trek to Kenya. At Kakuma camp, the UN provided trained teachers for the upper grades, but the lower grades were taught by people with little education themselves.

Deng, determined to advance into the upper grades as quickly as possible, sold okra he grew in the garden behind his hut to pay for private classes during the school term vacations while he was in the third grade. Rations were spare, so selling the okra sometimes meant going hungry. But he was able to skip from third grade into fifth.

"We had no paper to write on," he says. "No books. I learned to listen very carefully to the teachers. I separated cardboard from boxes into layers so I would have paper for taking notes."

On May 20, 2007, two days before he left JFK airport for Africa, Deng graduated with a B.A. in math education and honors from Le Moyne College, a Jesuit school in Syracuse. He is now pursuing a master's degree.

Accompanying Deng and two other "Lost Boys" were Connecticut journalist David Morse and filmmaker Jen Marlowe, who authored *Darfur Diaries*. Morse, who has written widely about Darfur, will share the platform with Deng at most Connecticut events, and where possible show slides of the vibrant and moving reception Deng received at his home village, of Ariang.

They will discuss their firsthand observations of the existing peace in South Sudan and address the question of what is happening to the oil money that was promised under the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which is now in its third year. They will also discuss the relationship between South Sudan and Darfur, which share a border several hundred miles long. That connection is especially relevant today, as violence increases in Darfur and tensions increase in the South.

Darfur expert Alex DeWaal, of Harvard, recently reported that South Sudan is "on a war footing." DeWaal says "It would be tragic and stupid if the internationals by focusing attention on Darfur blindfolded themselves to the prospects of an even greater tragedy that could be imminent in the South and South Kordofan."

The following events are scheduled:

In Danielson at Quinebaug Community College **Thursday, October 18**, a panel discussion and cluster of events entitled "Human Rights Matters Everywhere." A free bus will leave Quinebaug's Willimantic Center on Main Street at 1:00 p.m. and leave the Danielson campus at 3:30 p.m. to return to the Willimantic Center around 4:00 – 4:15. For further information call Riette Pranger (860) 742-1954.

In Mansfield at Storrs Friends Meeting (Quaker), Saturday evening, **October 20, at 7:00**. Presentation will include slides and discussion. Located at 57 Hunting Lodge Road where it intersects with North Eagleville. For further information call David Morse (860) 429-6803.

In Hartford, Sunday October 21, 2-4 p.m., at Minute Man Park / Emanuel Lutheran Church (300 Capitol Avenue, near State Capitol), at "Symbolic Olympic Torch Relay," aimed at urging China to use its influence on Khartoum, to bring the violence in Darfur to a halt. For more information contact Danielle Millard (860) 912-0380

In Storrs, Monday October 22, two events: at University of Connecticut, morning (schedule to be announced). For information contact Phoebe Godfrey at phoebe.godfrey@uconn.edu. **In Willimantic** at Eastern State Community College evening (schedule to be announced). For information contact Alyssa A. Goodin goodina@stu.easternct.edu or Brisa Palikuqi palikuqib@stu.easternct.edu.

All events are free and open to the public.