

Recently, I had the privilege of spending two weeks in Loreto, Rumbek, South Sudan. This foundation was made in response to a proposal, initiated at international IBVM level, that each province of Loreto/IBVM, throughout the world, should found a mission outside their geographical boundaries. In 2006, this mission was begun. This is the only all-girls secondary school in a diocese with a population of almost 4 million people. According to UNICEF fewer than one percent of girls complete primary education. Only one schoolchild in four is a girl and female illiteracy is the highest in the world. In this newly-established Republic, a woman's worth is determined by her value in terms of cows, and decisions regarding her future are made by her uncles. If her uncles are in need of money, they can decide to withdraw the girl from her studies and arrange a marriage to a man who will provide many cows in exchange for her and give her uncle a more lucrative income. Students in this school want to see women getting equal rights, their voices to be heard, and oppressive practices in that society changed. Advocacy on the part of women for MDG3 was never so relevant or necessary and there is much we can do to promote and address these issues as a matter of urgency.

*Louise O'Sullivan IBVM*

## **Student Stories:**

### **1. Claire Ayok Deng**



My name is Claire Ayok Deng and I am 16 years old. I am in Senior 2. A Dinka from the Lake State from the northern part. I am the first-born to my mother and I have two blood sisters and three blood brothers. My father has six wives and my mother is the fourth wife. I was born in 1995 in a small village near Rumbek. I remember my mother telling me that I was born in the evening at 6pm at their hiding place. Because there was civil war, people did not live in their houses because they would be killed if they were found. To make matters worse, I started crying so loud in the bush that my mother thought of leaving me and run away because she would be killed if she was found but since I was her first, and only child at the time, she became strong and kept on praying to God not to be found. In addition to the fact that I was born in the bush, my father wasn't around since he was a soldier and my mother had nothing to eat so she only kept going on boiling water and drank it to keep her strong. A kind-hearted lady came and took her to stay with her. When I was 2 years old, my father returned back home and in 2000 we migrated to Rumbek and by 2002, I joined Comboni School in Rumbek. When I was in Primary 5 I left for East Africa (Uganda) where I finally sat for my Primary Certificate. In 2010, I returned to Sudan and joined the Loreto Girls' Secondary School. In the future, I would like to become a doctor so that I can help my people in South Sudan because we do not have enough doctors. With all these difficulties, I am now living in a happy life so, my brothers and sisters, with God nothing is impossible.

## **2. Adeng Khamis**

My name is Adeng Khamis. I'm a second year student in Loreto Girls' Secondary School, Rumbek. I'm 18 years old. I belong to a tribe called Dinka Agar. In our culture, our ancestors are related to animals, weather and nature. My ancestors are related to the sun and so am I. We are known as paalong. Every Dinka child takes their relation from their father's side. My mother is also Dinka Agar but she has different ancestors and relations. She is from Rumbek North. The pa carm people and her ancestors are related to the moon and they are called padung bor.



I have five blood sisters and two blood brothers and four half-sisters and two half-brothers. My father has two wives.

I was born in Egypt in 1994. I guess that's when the world was blessed! In the city of Cairo. When I reached the age of 5 my family and I migrated to Australia where I learned to speak and write in English. We lived in Australia for 10 years and for ten years I forgot how to speak my mother-tongue and neither did I ever see my motherland. In 2011 I decided to come to Africa with my mum. I was terrified and horrified to see our land, tears emerged in my eyes and down my face cause the place just looked like a jungle. At times it was hard and it never got easier especially coming from the western life. It was the first time for me to see my relatives and until this very day, I keep meeting more. The hardest of all was when my mother left me with relatives that I didn't know or even seen in my whole life and knowing nobody, having no brothers or sisters. I was basically starting a new life, I guess. Now I live in Rumbek, Lakes State with my parental uncle. It's been one year now that I haven't seen my mother, father, brothers and sisters, but after every long road there's your destination and the Lord guided me through it and now I just feel like I've known these people all my life just after a year.

I pray that for the future I do become a lawyer to stand up for women's rights and give justice to the least respected gender in society. My new motto for life is patience is the key to success. I thank the Lord for this journey that is still going to go a long way. God bless you all. Life is an adventure. Explore it.

Yours heart-warmingly, Adeng Khamis.

## **3. Rebecca Nyanadong**



*From left to right:*

**Rebecca Nyanadong, Helena Nyangok, Mary Adut and Mary Apande**

I like studies and learning new things. My favourite subjects are maths, biology, chemistry and

physics. I was in Comboni Primary School and the Sisters told us about the Loreto Girls' Secondary School in Rumbek. I told my father what I had heard. He accepted and said if you like the school, then you go there. In my primary school class, there were 45 students, three girls, the rest were all boys. One girl went to Rumbek secondary school because she liked boys in her class; the other girl was pregnant at 18 years old and I came here. The mixed Rumbek Secondary School was closed for most of the year. It opened in May and closed in July. My father's brother decides when I'm ready for marriage. If my father accepts, then I get married and if not, then I don't. They don't consider your rights. If you're working hard in the school, they'll understand and if not they'll take you out.

I like music and film. I like Glee very much. I like the young people and helps you to give expression. I like knowing about other people's cultures, meeting people from outside Africa. I like the Republic of South Sudan because it will give us more rights. I voted. It was excited about that.

I would like to see that there is equality between women and men. There is no equality here. It is a big challenge in the culture. I would like to see women in the future having more rights and I would like to be a part of that.

We have a justice and peace group in the school. We look at the issues of girls and promoting peace in society.

I would like to be educated. It is important because it helps you to understand your life better and helps you to know yourself and others, and to know the negative things that are still continuing in our culture.

I believe that I will see my dreams become reality.

#### ***4. Helena Nyangok Mangar***

I like school. I meet with many people and I like studying.

My favourite subjects are biology and chemistry. I like music, pop and rock: Akom (African) pop; Michael Jackson; I like films white films and Nigerian. I like English films. Nigerian comedy films are good.

Life is hard. Sometimes it's worrying. If you go home, for example, you are not allowed to visit your friends or have a chat with them. Sometimes you are not allowed to go out to enjoy yourself. Parents are afraid that girls might get pregnant or run away. I have more freedom at school than I have at home. I have learnt the English language since I came. I used to be taught in Dinka in primary school. I've made very good progress in the language and I'm very happy about that. It has developed my confidence. Debates have helped too. I was very shy when I came to school here.

In my faith, the school has made a difference to my life. I participate every Sunday here in the school. At home I don't participate so much.

I was crying when I couldn't vote for our new Republic because I was too young to vote but I went with my father to see what was happening.

I would like to be a doctor and I am interested in building a school for girls in Rumbek because there are so few girls who have gone to school.

Thank you for your support and I promise I won't let you down. I'll work hard.

### **5. Mary Apande Gum**

I am 18 years of age and I am in Senior 3. My uncle said that I should go to Loreto. He said it was better to go there because it is a boarding school. I cried when I left home. In my family, there are Six, members: four boys and two girls and I'm the second-born in the family. The family was very happy for me to do my studies here.

Boarding school promotes interaction between different communities and give us different ideas from different people. I would like to thank the Loreto Sisters as well as the founder of our school, Bishop Caesar Mazollari, for their kindly commitment to encourage and support girl child education in the Republic of South Sudan.

My favourite subjects are Biology, Chemistry, Maths. I like music in general. I'm enjoying doing the guitar a lot.

I would like to be an educated lady in the future. Education will make my life better in the future. I'm very happy to be in the new Republic of South Sudan because it will allow us to follow our studies and change cultural practices. I'd like to see the practice of early and forced marriages changing in our society. At the moment girls get married at 13, 14, 15 years of age. I would like parents to allow girls to go to school. Many of the girls don't go to secondary school and go to the cattle camps. In cattle camps, an old man can marry a young girl as a punishment if the girl gets pregnant; he could be 60s or 70s, and her parents would let her marry this man. If the old man has wealth, they don't worry about the consequences for the girl. I would like to see that practice changing and girls to get equal rights. I would like to government to give equal rights to both the male child and the female child. At the moment that's not happening. I would also like to say to our parents to stop admiring somebody else's cows and wish for their daughters to get married while the girl is in school, focusing the concentrating with her studeies. For sure is she heard those rumous she will not be focused on achieving her goal to achieve it. She will start thinking about marriage not studies. Those are my thoughts.

I would like to be a doctor treating people with heart problems. People have a lot of heart problems here and I'd like to be able to help them. There are many doctors but very few female doctors in South Sudan and that's another reason why I'd like to be doctor.

### **Mary Adut Muorde - Age: 19**

I have three sisters and four brothers. I am the fifth in my family. My friends are happy and encouraging about my education here. I heard about the school here from the Sisters. My uncle said that I must be in that school and he was very happy about that.

Favourite subjects: biology, chemistry, physics and maths. My ambition for the future is based on those subjects.

Interests: I would like to be a general physician.

I like general entertainment: I like John Kudsay, a local musician, from Aweal. I like religious and Nigerian films.

I am very happy with our new Republic of South Sudan. It will change our lives. We'll have freedom and change our culture, duties. I voted in the election. It was very historic for me.

Foods: I like rice, asida (maize based food), and pasta.

I would like to encourage the education of girls in our society because few girls are in school. When I was in P6 in primary school, I told my friends that I would like to be an accountant. I would now like to be a physician as there is such a need for women doctors in our country.