

Coalition of Willing Update
By Esther Sprague, Board Member
July 2, 2008

May 7-21, 2008, I travelled to Juba for the SPLM's 2nd National Convention. The Convention was delayed and so I had the opportunity to work on the Coalition of Willing's project to build a school in Kolnyang.

I met John Antipas, the Minister of Education for Jonglei State, and John Jock Chol, the Bishop Commissary for Akobo Area of the Episcopal Church of the Sudan Diocese of Bor and Advisor to the Governor for Peace and Development of Jonglei State. They were very pleased to learn of COW's plans to build schools in the five payams of Bor and offered their support as school buildings are the greatest need for education.

John Antipas encouraged COW to consider building a girls' boarding school for grades 5-8 because at this age, girls tend to drop out of school to get married. He also shared that there are 127,000 children enrolled in primary school but only 160 schools with most of them under the trees. At this point, secondary school isn't even an option.

John Antipas introduced me to Sharon Mous the Education Officer for UNICEF. I was able to meet with Sharon and Peter Crowley, the Director of UNICEF. I learned that UNICEF provides to every State registered school textbooks, supplies, sports equipment, a teacher's kit plus a backpack for students and tent for the rainy season if supplies are available. UNICEF stressed the importance of working closely with the State Minister of Education in order to coordinate efforts. Teacher salaries are paid by the Government of Southern Sudan, however because of the shortage of funds, many teachers work as volunteers. UNICEF also provides training for Parent Teacher Associations and programs to encourage girls to attend school.

At the recommendation of John Antipas, I visited the Ministry of Legal Affairs to learn how to register COW with the Government of Southern Sudan. It is not a difficult process but it requires hiring a lawyer to prepare the necessary paperwork plus a fee of \$400 in addition to the attorney's fee. I was very fortunate to have a friend, Muki Lita, agree to take care of the paperwork for COW, and we are pleased to announce that Coalition of Willing is now registered with the Government of Southern Sudan.

COW's board has been considering whether or not it is best to hire a contractor to build a school or to work with UNICEF or an existing NGO in the area to build the school. After talking with a number of people in Juba, we decided it would be best to hire a contractor to build the school. COW will place an ad in a Juba newspaper requesting construction bids for our first school in Kolnyang.

It was great to be in Juba and to see the progress that is being made in Southern Sudan and to know that the schools COW will establish are contributing to the rebuilding efforts of the country.