

Franklin Graham Celebrates South Sudan's Independence Day

Franklin Graham will be a witness to South Sudan history this weekend.

The CEO and president of both Samaritan's Purse and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association will be on hand to celebrate South Sudan's first weekend of Independence from Sudan.

Saturday marks South Sudan's official Independence Day.

"Americans just celebrated the birth of the United States, so it is with special appreciation that we now turn to another nation preparing to start its own journey of independence," Franklin Graham said in a Samaritan's Purse statement. "Saturday, July 9, will be the day that South Sudan will officially become the youngest country on earth."

Marking this historic event, Graham will meet with the presidents of both countries, first with South Sudan President Salva Kiir Mayardit on Saturday, before departing for Khartoum to meet with Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir.

A military parade and other celebrations are planned and dozens of world leaders are also expected to witness Saturday's festivities.

"For the past few decades, the world has watched this part of Africa suffer through one of the deadliest civil wars in history," Graham said. "As I look back over the years that Samaritan's Purse has been providing relief and aid across a war-torn Sudan, it now brings me great joy and honor to attend the celebration of South Sudan's Independence Day."

Ken Isaacs, vice president of programs for Samaritan's Purse,

will accompany Graham in Juba, the new capital of South Sudan. Isaacs has been working in this country for nearly 20 years.

"I hope that believers all over the world will keep praying for South Sudan to become a prosperous country and a beacon of freedom in the Horn of Africa," Isaacs said. "I also hope you will join me in praising God for this new nation."

On Isaacs' first trip almost two decades ago, "Civil war was raging and the people in the south were living in the most miserable circumstances imaginable."

Juba and the rest of South Sudan is still recovering from the civil war that killed over two million people from 1983 to 2005, but with its new-found freedom and the help of Samaritan's Purse, Africa's 54th country has reason for hope.

Isaacs remembers January 9, 2005, the day the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed, vividly: "I had spent so many years watching the people in southern Sudan fight to survive and praying with them that peace would come."

But Isaacs also knows the South Sudan situation is still an uphill climb, with only 15 percent of this new country literate and a shortage of basic necessities.

"Most of the south has little or no infrastructure," he said. "Most people there have no access to basics like clean water and education."

Since 1993, Samaritan's Purse has invested around \$100 million to help the people of Sudan, rebuilding 425 churches since 2005, many in remote villages.

In 1997, Samaritan's Purse began restoring the Lui Hospital, the only primary care facility for hundreds of thousands, and operated it during the civil war.

The Kurmuk Hospital, which Samaritan's Purse rehabilitated in 2002 and continues to operate, is the only secondary facility

in the southern half of Blue Nile State where patients can receive specialized treatment.

Samaritan's Purse has also rehabbed three primary healthcare units, a hospital ward and a TB ward in eastern Sudan, where severely malnourished children and nursing mothers are being served.

"There is still much that needs to be done to help the people of both countries," Graham said, "and I pray that God will give these leaders wisdom and courage to lead their people, uniting their hearts toward the goal of reconciliation and peace."

Used with permission from the Billy Graham Evangelical Association.