Second time refugee hopes his native South Sudan can put its house in order and start afresh

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South Sudanese refugee David Wang is busy helping UNHCR staff with Nuer-English-Nuer translation at the newly established Leitchuor camp in western Ethiopia where thousands of fresh arrivals from South Sudan have been sheltered. At the same time, he welcomes fellow South Sudanese refugees who arrived after him into the country he considers his second home. "I'm back home and feel obliged to make my compatriots feel at home as well", says the father of five, referring to his 14 years of exile in Ethiopia that came to an end with a voluntary repatriation back in 2007.

 David is one of nearly 61,000 South Sudanese refugees who arrived in Ethiopia since mid-December when the world's youngest nation erupted in violence. The conflict has to date displaced nearly 900,000 people including some 190,000 as refugees in neighboring countries-many of them for the second time.

David first came to Ethiopia as a refugee back in 1994 when the Government of Sudan and its then southern opponents were embroiled in one of Africa's longest civil wars which claimed countless lives and displaced hundreds of thousands. The 46-year-old remembers his days in the now closed Dimma camp where he and thousands of fellow refugees were accommodated in Ethiopia. He said those were days full of hope replete with positive dreams for the country that was heading for eventual independence.

"No matter how good your hosts may be, life as a refugee is not something to be happy about", he says and adds, "But the fact that we had hopes of a bright future ahead coupled with the idea of returning home and being able to contribute to the process of re-building the new nation kept us strong".

David completed high school in 2003 while in Dimma camp and scored enough marks to pursue University education which got him a slot in the University of Juba, then under Sudan. "I left Dimma for Addis en route to Khartoum, but I suddenly learnt that I had missed the deadline set for submitting my application," he said, with signs of regret visible in his face. Saddened by the news, he went back to Gambella where he was met by a UNHCR Field-Officer who offered him a teaching job in Pugnido, one of the remaining three refugee camps in the western Ethiopian region of Gambella from those days, which he accepted with delight. Hence, he was transferred to Pugnido with his wife and two children who

were born in Dimma. David, who was described by a UNHCR staff remember who worked with him at the time, as a very good leader and coordinator, was elected deputy chairperson of the Refugee Central Committee (RCC) three months after he was transferred to Pugnido and became the Chairperson a year later.

The signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005 by Sudan's warring factions ended more than two decades of war and paved the road for the return of Sudanese refugees from neighboring countries, including Ethiopia.

David was able to return home with his family in 2007 and started working as an Investigation Officer at Grievances Commission in Malakal, a post he held for three years. In 2010, in the quest to fulfilling his dream of contributing to changing his nation in a big way, the young man ran for a seat in Parliament at the National Assembly. "I wanted to help change my country but I could not win the election," he said, flushing a sarcastic smile.

David has since been serving his new country as a teacher until internecine conflict and violence in the world's newest nation in mid-December 2013 forced him and his family out of the country once again. This time he fled with his wife and five children. Three were born during his first exile in Ethiopia and two after his voluntary repatriation with support from UNHCR.

David confesses that his dream of contributing to the building of a peaceful and prosperous nation for his children has evaporated like morning dew. He nonetheless, does not want to give up completely. "With serious internal reconciliation and support from friendly nations, we can leave this dark episode behind us and march ahead afresh," he concluded.

By Betel Getachew, in Leitchuor Refugee Camp, Ethiopia