



**MANDELA WASHINGTON
FELLOWSHIP**
FOR YOUNG AFRICAN LEADERS

Bullets to Books

Speakers

- Hon. Tom Hushek, former U.S. Ambassador to South Sudan
- Gail Prensky, Reciprocal Exchange Participant
- Andy Truschinski, Reciprocal Exchange Participant
- Sean MacLaughlin, Reciprocal Exchange Participant
- Cindy Oxberry, Reciprocal Exchange Participant
- Jok Abraham Thon, 2018 Fellowship Alumnus, South Sudan
- Lupai Stephen, 2018 Fellowship Alumnus, South Sudan
- Moses Mawa, South Sudan Architect
- Stephanie Mercedes, Artist

Session Transcript

Gail Prensky: Welcome. We are so glad you are here. I am Gail Prensky, and I am a Mandela Washington Fellowship Reciprocal Exchange awardee at 2019. I am looking forward to sharing our Bullets To Books program with you today. I want to thank the American Impact Award, Mandela Washington Fellowship and State Department for making this program possible.

Bullets To Books started from a meeting one evening back in August 2018. I met with Mandela Washington fellow Jok Abraham Thon who was attending the young African Leader Summit in Washington DC. Never would have imagined several months later a team of four of us would travel to South Sudan to meet up with Jok and our team to begin efforts of filming and leading education and cultural exchange workshops.

Today, you will meet the U.S. team and some members of our South Sudan team who will share experiences and efforts of Bullets To Books. Our presenters from the U.S. include Andy Truschinski and Sean MacLaughlin, my producing partners on the Bullets To Books documentary. Cindy Oxberry co-led the education and cultural exchange workshops. Here we are, with John Seabrook, our public affairs officer and champion who took great care of us. This was the first morning we were in Juba. Also presented today are the South Sudan teammates Lou by Samuel Kenyi, and Mandela Washington fellow in 2017 and Jok Abraham Thon, founder of promised land secondary school and Mandela Washington fellow in 2018.

Jok is the inspiration for Bullets To Books.



This photo shows Cindy and me with our team the first morning in Juba. Lupai is on the left and Jok is on the right. On the right is scopist, Crown the Woman, Simon, a film festival and Jacob Avenue and it's a buy. Jacob was a Mandela Washington Fellow in 2017. You will also hear from Washington DC based artist, Stephanie Mercedes who goes by the name Mercedes, South Sudan architect of Moses Mawa.

We will have a discussion. Feel free to add your comments via Twitter or in the YouTube comments field. I would like to introduce you to our special guest, the former Ambassador to South Sudan, Ambassador Tom Hushek with opening remarks for.

Ambassador Tom Hushek: Thank you, Gail I am so excited you asked me to participate in today's event. I first met Gail and Jok Abraham, whom you will hear from a little bit later while serving as American Ambassador to Juba from 2018 to 2020. Our embassy and Juba had a very important mission representing the world's oldest Republic, the United States to the world's youngest, youngest both in terms of the nationhood and also in terms of its youthful population demographics. The challenges in South Sudan were enormous bringing an end to the brutal Civil War, and alleviating hunger and preventing famine, encountering widespread corruption and combating forced displacement illiteracy, infectious diseases and widespread poverty.

I like to describe the mission and more positive terms, we were there to promote that kind of resilience needed to build a lasting peace or to help heal the trauma that had touched every South Sudan family and to aid in building the conditions for development, good governance and hope. As U.S. diplomats, we had very powerful tools to tackle these challenges. For example, high-level engagement and pressure to coax political leaders in the government and in opposition to do the right thing or the generous assistance programs funded by the U.S. taxpayers to alleviate food insecurity and invest in health and education.

Yet, in my experience, in South Sudan, as elsewhere during my diplomatic career, I found that among the most valuable investments embassies make were in cultural and educational exchanges, especially with the youth in our partnering countries. In South Sudan, I want to point out the Young African Leadership Initiative Program, which first gave Jok Abraham the opportunity to travel to America on a Mandela Fellowship along with other young Africans. There, he met Gail who later came to Juba on a cultural exchange program, a pioneer helping us at the embassy to reestablish the exchanges after several year hiatus caused by security concerns.

These low costs, but highly valuable exchanges are a key part of what we call people to people this Diplomacy they have future leaders and strengthen relations between South Sudanese and American people. While I was always proud of our high-level diplomatic engagement, that pressure to hammer out a peace agreement or funding humanitarian and development programs to alleviate human suffering and stave off the worst aspects of violence or trauma or poverty or corruption, by far, my

most favorite tool and the part of our work that always inspired me the most, it gave me the most hope for South Sudan future was promoting people to people relations.

It was a low-cost, bottom-up, soft power approach that I believe will ultimately be the most effective and sustainable lever for positive and lasting change in the lives of our South Sudanese sisters and brothers. There are no magic formulas, at least I have not found one for tackling South Sudan's biggest challenges violence, corruption, poverty, trauma. I know the multimillion dollar programs and high-level policy interventions are important as they are, will not succeed on their own.

I came away from Juba more convinced and even more optimistic than ever that more people to people Diplomacy is necessary. More community level interventions, building and reinforcing the resiliency and providing individuals the opportunity, especially for youths of Sudan. These are the kind of diplomatic interventions that will bring hope, prosperity and lasting peace.

With that, by way of context, let's hear more about the particular example of people to people Diplomacy that resulted in Bullets To Books initiative. I'm sure that everyone listening will be inspired by this effort, which has grown out of the initial acquaintance between Gail Prensky and her team from America and Jok Abraham and his expanding group of young community activists, advocates and future leaders of South Sudan. Let me turn the screen back over to Gail and Jok Abraham.

Gail Prensky: Thank you, Ambassador. In addition to my being a Reciprocal Exchange awardee, I am the founder of the project of which Bullets To Books ends in initiative. The cultural project explores issues of oppression and response through music and art. Its mission is to connect people through commonality, inspire creative response to persecution, and encourage freedom of expression and culture.

We start with the story of Jewish performing artist good that means Jewish Cultural Association and Nazi Germany connecting to current day artists around the world. In the summer 2018, I became interested in South Sudan as one of the places to explore as part of our efforts on project, which miraculously led me to an introduction to Jok and Washington DC. Jok, please tell everyone about yourself, how we met, and the vision and mission have changing minds for Bullets To Books. Sorry, we are having some kind of audio issue. Jok, maybe what I can do is start talking a little bit more about the meeting and then hopefully, Jok will step in as soon as possible.

When I met Jok at the YALI Summit that evening, I was blown away. He walked into the room, this very tall person. I felt like I had met an angel. When we started talking about each other's missions and visions, it became clear we had a strong connection. We believed so much in education and cultural exchange and finding peace and unity. Jok, can you try talking?

I understand that the Internet signal has frozen. Jok, I am going to keep talking, but you interrupt me at any point. What Jok told me about was that he had started the Promise Land Secondary School a few years before. He and friends had built a few buildings on this campus that he owns in Juba made out of bamboo, mud, concrete. The problem was that the heavy rains, they would cause damage to these buildings. He needed help, he needed support to replace these buildings with permanent structures. He also told me about these children that he brought to the school. He went to church one day and said, the only thing necessary was for the parents to register their children. He started with 250 kids. Promise Land Secondary Schools were founded. He also believes that it is through this education that he can raise up the children, just like he and surviving genocide and massacres to become strong leaders for peace.

What I ended up doing was I was so taken with his story that I told him the story of what we do for creating programs that inspire peace in art and culture. Together, we thought we have to work together. I immediately called up my colleague in New York. I told him the whole story that I had heard from it Jok. He said, my God, we have to do a documentary film about him and his vision and help him. I said yes.

The other thing that I thought we needed to do, if we were going to help Jok build these permanent structures, we had to find an architect. I called up a colleague that I knew at mass design group in Boston, Massachusetts. He put me in touch with an architect in Juba, Moses Mawa. I am going to turn this over to Moses and ask him to now walk us through his vision and plans for the architecture, design and construction at Promise Land Secondary School. Moses, can you try talking? Standby. I think what we can do is -- I am sorry, I did not know I was going to take on so much of this screen, but I can walk us through the plants if you want to bring up that. That is an aerial shot of Jok's Promise Land and we say some conceptual designs. What Moses has done, we are going to face this in. Ultimately, there will be several buildings, but the building that you see here is under construction now and it is called the Ruth Ginsburg Building that will be a multi-use of building for lab and administration and classrooms. It is now, I believe the walls have been built and they kids can sit in there and have some classroom instruction. Here, you see the excavation of the land.

Now, what we really need, and we hope is that you all will understand how important it is for this permanent structure to happen. The Minister of education came by a couple weeks ago and was so glad to see that this building was being constructed is because he had threatened to close down Promise Land, which is super great. We would love for all of you viewers to learn more about what Jok is doing, and Moses is doing for Promise Land.

We really welcome support, and we can tell you more about how to reach out to us later. I think now, we can hand this over to Andy and Sean and learn more about the story of Bullets To Books and what Jok is hoping to accomplish now and in the future.

Andy Truschinski: Hello, I am Andy Truschinski, and I am with Bullets To Books. I cannot tell you how proud and happy I am to be here and explain to you this whole thing, this gigantic organization that has formed off of one man's Mission. We will figure it out and we will get to Jok eventually. I just want to give quick background. Gail had mentioned that we came up with the idea together that we had to get this story out there. In order to do that, I needed to find someone else who could do some of the videography and cinematography. I reached out to my friend, Sean. Sean come introduce yourself.

Sean MacLaughlin: Hello, I'm Sean MacLaughlin, photographer and editor of Bullets To Books. Andy reached out to me and we are old friends and work on a different project together years ago. He reached out to see if I wanted to go to South Sudan. It was a beautiful opportunity, of course, the family was scared, and everyone was a little nervous saying do you want to go over there right now? Sure, why not. It was one of the most gorgeous experiences of my life. It was very wonderful.

Andy Truschinski: The thing that was so great about it, you could see some of the pictures flowing along. You could just see one of the things we discovered when we got there was that we kind of understood the resiliency of these people, but it became so humanized. Sometimes you to be in a location to see it. Not only were there these laureates atmosphere, but you meet South Sudanese people, and they are the most openhearted, resilient and honest people you will ever meet. Once we got to fully be into the school, you saw the students.

You remember anything specific, Sean? Let's talk about the kids specifically that this will help out.

Sean MacLaughlin: I was blown away how brilliant these kids are. They were way far ahead from when I have seen in the United States, at least in the education. These kids were in a collegiate level and what we would consider ninth-grade. The education over there, that Jok has provided, that blew me away. It's kind of made me a little ashamed of our education system in the United States.

Andy Truschinski: At least our own to personal wants.

Sean MacLaughlin: Yes, at least what I came from.

Andy Truschinski: You can see here, through some of the images that have scrolled through, it was such a fun time. They were so welcoming us to their campus. We had such a fun time being able to flip and an out of there ceremony to welcome us. It was just pure, honest, good times. I cannot thank Jok and his school and at.

Just purely on that personal note, I have been fully invested to figure out how we can sustain these new structures to be able to get this thing even moving forward so that he can reach out even more in his own country. It all starts with the seed of changing minds from Bullets To Books to eventually get

to having that school, but too multiple schools throughout the country. We are more than proud to be part of it.

Sean MacLaughlin: Amen.

Andy Truschinski: Also, I hope you're taking in some of these images. It was so fun capturing everything. Rather than keep talking about our experience and explaining to you what it looks like, let's actually show it to you in our short documentary titled Bullets To Books.

Cindy Oxberry: Hello, I am Cindy Oxberry and I'm a musician, music producer, director and music educator at the performing arts and a proud member of the project. I am happy to say that I live off of what Ambassador Huchek's said. I am an Ambassador for performing art. I am primarily working and live art so taking that skill into programming has been great fun.

Gail invited me to become part of the JKP and I began working in 2018. We worked in colleges here and the states presenting workshops. In 2019, I became a recipient of the MWF Reciprocal Exchange component for Young African Leaders and I headed to Juba South Sudan in June. On the plane ride to Juba, I pulled out an index card I had taken with me that had the JKP mission statement. Power of music and art, resiliency of the human spirit will to survive.

On my first day of many days of our performance and education workshops, Gail and I began exploring issues of oppression. We met such interesting groups that had signed up for the workshop, artists from (inaudible) and INPs. We work with a group from Jok's school, the promised land secondary school and also with a group from the organization Crown the Woman. We worked with elite entertainment artists and we even lead a workshop with the intro to documentary film making for emerging ailment makers.

We collected data, information that allowed us to track how many people were taking these workshops. Name, gender, age, education levels. In Juba, we had over 100 people involved in our workshops. The workshop sheets, it helped us to start and asked everyone to pick one prompt and then follow the instructions. The prompt was in three categories using visual art, use music or use word. Each option had a roadblock or two thrown in to challenge what would limit them in some way or would inspire them to try a different road and tap deeper into their imagination.

A human resource that cannot be taken away from you. They had pens, paper, Styrofoam coffee cups and water bottles as potential tools to help them. They began creating something and every person was involved. The Juba participants had a deep understanding of oppression because they had first-hand knowledge as a nation. The performance themes were overwhelming, struggle, loss, freedom, hope, liberation, and nationalism.

Using lyrics and songs, poems and images, they turned pencils into drumsticks, water bottles into microphones and the South Sudanese flag was drawn on coffee cups held high. One of my favorite groups was from the organization Crown the Woman. We divided the participants into three small groups. We challenge them to pick a prompt. I did not have to do much pulling to get the idea out of these young women as they were so enthusiastic. Within one hour, they had written lyrics, wrote a poem, and then performed it.

Cindy Oxberry: When I looked out at the young people that day and every day, I thought of my grandparents who arrived in America as young children, immigrants themselves coming with one suitcase in their hand and hope in their heart for a better life.

Their children, my mom and her siblings, were first-generation Americans who grew up in the depression era in the 20th century. They were raised to be proud citizens of the United States of America. My personal background growing up, it was a struggle. My mom did everything she could to make sure that her children thrived and helped with their education. Each day in Juba, I would come to the workshops and look out at them and say I understand you and I honor your journey. I hope you will continue your education and make your nation better.

I discovered that the students and young professionals we met in South Sudan want a better life for themselves and want their home to be their nation. They did exceed during those days of the workshops by digging deeper inside of themselves to create and share a form of artistic expression outside themselves. All proud and full of hope. Thank you.

Lupai Stephen: Hello, everyone. I am Lupai, the founder of the peace initiative and I am also an Alumni from the Mandela Washington Fellowship in 2018. South Sudan is such a diverse country. It is diverse and so many ways when it comes to its rich culture, but something that stands out is actually the resilience of its people. Now, most importantly, I want to talk about the different ways people raise their children. We have two categories of kids, one is kids who go to school and we have kids who do not go to school. Those who do not go to school on choice and those who do not go to school because they do not have the means to go to school.

One of the biggest challenges that affect children is that a lot of them have been recruited as child soldiers throughout the years given the recent 2013 and 2016 crisis. That has actually affected a lot when it comes to the development of the system and the development of our children. In 2018, I was privileged with the Mandela Washington Fellowship where I landed some leadership skills on how I can move Iron Peace forward and put all of the ideas I had into perspective. When you look at the two different pictures that are shown up there, you see kids who are in uniforms and you see kids who wear school uniforms. This shows the two distinct kinds of kids. I ask myself, how can I make sure that South Sudan is that kind of country that I admire? How do I make South Sudan the kind of country that is celebrated and not used to torture each other? How do I make South Sudan the place

that everyone will want to visit? Sean, his family at the end of the day was worried of how he would get here and how safe he was going to be.

South Sudan, everyone will admire. How can we get that South Sudan everyone will admire? Now, looking at the way that the world evolves, we always know that children are the people who build up the vision that we want. If you give a good foundation to these children, we have a better foundation and a better future. They will have a generation of people whose mindset are trying to -- how can we roll out this kind of perspective where the children are taught to hold that guns and they rolled that out and have a country where children are given the pen rather than the bullets, you are given the book and rather than the gun you are given the pen.

I am pleased that we have worked so hard to advocate for peaceful ways through different ways. We can achieve peace as a country is to first advocate for education. Now, we know that when you advocate for education, you have a generation of people who will first have to think before they act and they have to be careful whatever they say, whatever they do before they act. That generation cannot be built if we do not build strong institutions and visions. When you look at what is happening around us, there are many projects that every year is being rolled out. You see very little efforts that are being put to support the system. Can the people be -- can the people have education as a priority? They paid protection, security as a priority knowing that the more the young people, the more we will have generations of people who will always have a mindset of conflict.

As Iron Peace, I was excited to meet Jok and I met Jok through the Mandela Fellowship before we travel to the United States in 2018. Afterward, his story and my story are all getting at the same thing and that is the peace we want in our country. Though, he is directly having that by building schools, one thing is as advocating more for a lot of education.

We have a lot of platforms that we use and platforms to advocate for social change and we use music, media, and we also use outreach activities. We use a lot of other ads such as films and theater and all of that.

Looking at all of these structures, I was excited when Jok shared with me about meeting Gail Prensky and the United States. The fact that she was actually working around one of the platforms that we use. How do we bring this an education to gather and how do we use the tools to ensure that we advocate for the change that we need as a country? After having a lot of conversations through the help of the U.S. Embassy and through the help of the State Department, we connected with Gail and Jok and we had a lot of conversations. When they came to Juba, our first mission was how can we use this to advocate for education to create a change in the mindsets from Bullets To Books. That is a key basis, as I was coming out with a song, which is now a theme song of this whole idea. This whole global transforming idea of Bullets To Books. The Bullets To Books brings different South Sudanese

from different regions and students from one region. We create the diversity, and we need to do that and the certain sector.

Here it is, the Bullets To Books music video and this is a music video that we produced here and Juba and in the background, if you can listen, you will hear Andy and Sean's voice. Also, I would say it was a huge collaboration with everyone. Let's look at the Bullets To Books video and speaking of how we need to change their mind from Bullets To Books and send more children to school.

Stephanie Mercedes: Hello, everyone. I am Mercedes. What I do as an artist is I take guns, bullet casings, firearms, and I melt them down and transform them into musical installations or musical instruments and public works of art. What I want to do as an artist is I want to take the materiality of violence and turn it into its opposite, turn it into something which is beautiful, which is peaceful, which is really the very opposite of what a gun or bullet casing could be.

The video I am about to show you is me melting down a six-hour CMX rifle that is the rifle that was used during the Orlando club at shooting. As a gay Latina woman, I felt like I so easily could have been and that club. It transformed my path as a creative. I decided to take this massive assault rifle and melt it down and turned it into 49 Liberty bells for the 49 individuals who lost their lives that night.

Why do I do, as an artist, is very different from what a lot of activists per se, but as an artist, what I can do is visually represent what so many activists want to do. I personally cannot change policies; however, I can show that it is possible to melt down guns and bullets to make these beautiful objects, which is everything that Bullets To Books in this project represents. That is why when I met Gail, we both realized that in so many ways my practice mirrored what Bullets To Books and what Jok was trying to do.

The following sculpture is a book, which is cast out of melted bullets and is currently and the Chinese bookstore in DC honoring the life of a DC-based journalist who lost her life to gun violence. So similarly, to this project, the bookstore is really trying to get bullets out of the streets and to promote education. One of the things I would like to do and collaboration with Bullets To Books is to cast a large public art sculpture at Jok's school that would be cast in a ceremony in which everyone would come together and melted bullets to make this beautiful and large sculpture of a book, which symbolizes how it is possible to take the materiality of violence and turn it into a book.

Another thing that I will be doing with Bullets To Books is that I would be melting down bullet casings of the vast majority come from the DC Department of forensic science. I will be casting bricks or building blocks and Bullets To Books will be filling them to raise money for this project. Thank you so much, everyone.

Ambassador Tom Hushek: This has been really inspiring for me and is a great reminder about the Bullets To Books initiative. There is all of the outgrowth of it whether it is Mercedes artwork, the performances, this is really the specific example that I hope boosts my general assertion about the value of people to people Diplomacy and exchange programs. Americans can and should be proud of our governments place and South Sudan as this is funded by her taxes and reflects American generosity.

It can also take pride in the great work that they UN desk and South Sudan. They have the world 's largest peacekeeping operation and the largest food security programs in Africa. This did win a Nobel Peace Prize this year. You know the UN programs are highly funded by the United States. These are all tremendously important initiatives, but years of experience leave me convinced. After watching this, the best investments that we make are not necessarily the biggest. Never underestimate the real and lasting value of people to people Diplomacy in action.

Today's web event not affected memories of Gail and Cindy's exchange visit to Juba. I'm sorry that we had some audio problems with Jok being able to describe the Promised Land School. I can tell you my own visit there was really inspiring, and I attended on awards day. This was three years into Jok's school. He had students who had received the top awards, boy and girl and the entire country of South Sudan for graduating seniors.

The quality of that school is amazing. With this new building that you see plans for, it is going to be even better, and this is what the country needs. I also remember attending performances of a I am Peace. For those way back in my generation, this is reminiscent of Michael Jackson's We Are the World and bringing collaboration of all of the best artists and South Sudan, mostly singers, but I know some standup comedians and other artists. It was quite the collaboration. That video should go viral. I am confident these are the programs that will secure a real future for South Sudan and keep the connections between South Sudanese and Americans very strong. I recognize it is not easy for most people to hop on a plane and go for South Sudan or really anywhere during the pandemic, but for those of you who don't have the opportunity to visit in person, I hope you got a glimpse of the impact from these initiatives during today's event.

Let me give a shout out to those who organized this online opportunity today. Everyone behind the scenes and on-screen that help to pull this off. This was what I come to expect from the Bullets to Books people. I wanted to highlight some themes and give some stray suggestions that I believe came out what we heard here today.

First, at the risk of repeating myself, people to people Diplomacy is the best investment we can make to tackle even the most daunting challenges such as building a lasting peace and prosperity for the next generation of South Sudanese. Stick with it.

Second, I want to say Jok and Moses planned for the school, we just described a fraction of the difficulties faced by the Promised Land School. If anything, they understated the challenges posed by the South Sudanese context where they government has severely underfunded education and we are at more than 2 million children are without any opportunity to go to school. I think Lupai mentioned some of that as well.

Not like, the value of Promised Land School and other citizen led cultural on education initiatives really cannot be overstated. Another points, keep your eye out for opportunities to meet South Sudanese here and in America. Take advantage of our country's heritage of diversity and generosity toward refugees and other immigrants. You may very well have South Sudanese or Januvia and Americans living in your own communities. They are probably the tallest people in the room at local churches or neighborhoods and schools. Reach out to them and start practicing people to people Diplomacy even at home.

One more point to close on, it is a lesson that I have learned by watching today and from a lifelong career as an American diplomat. That his people to people Diplomacy is as valuable for America and for the Americans hazardous to our partners such as the South Sudanese. I have always learned so much more about American values, generosity and strength to see these traits reflected back from friends overseas. These are people to people projects that we heard about today and are clear demonstrations of hope, hard work, humility. These are values that a lot of Americans mistakenly believed to be uniquely American, but as you can see, there are traits and values that are shared by the best of our South Sudanese ends and by those around the world. That is what people to people Diplomacy is all about.

Congratulations to everybody who put this event together today. Thank you and I think back over to Gail.

Gail Prensky: Thank you so much, Ambassador. You know how to rock this for sure. One of the challenges that we also have is the Internet. We have to find ways to help support Jok and the community there in order or us to continue doing good work and cultural exchange efforts. Jok, if you are able, I know that your video is kind of dark, but I think you are on audio. If you can unmute, I would like to ask you a question. Can you say hello?

Jok Abraham Thon: Hello.

Gail Prensky: Okay, great. Jok, we are hoping you will come back to the U.S. Hopefully, in autumn, can you talk a little bit about your vision for efforts that you hope will do when you are here?

Jok Abraham Thon: Thank you so much, Gail Prenskey and all of the listeners of this amazing program. I am really excited to join. I am Jok Thon and the founder of Promised Land School. Regarding the question, I am really excited because it has been my dream to inspire the generation of the young people. My call is how do we inspire the young people to make us a society to build a future that is more peaceful for the younger generation to come.

When we talk about Bullets To Books, global efforts, my idea is to bring together the people around the world focused on how dangerous is our invention into guns. The world is going so fast into growing the culture of guns. My idea, when I am in the U.S., I can speak to young students and kids on how to understand how important they are to one another and the importance of this.

One of the people will believe that the world can be a peaceful place when we cherish, or we value ourselves. Every groundbreaking invention comes when someone has decided to beyond his or her vision. I will restore hope in the lives of the young people to know that we are in the world that needs our invention and needs our ideas to make it a peaceful one for all of us. Take for example, (inaudible) in Africa, when I speak into the assault, I hope they will be able to return themselves and will denounce the forms of guns, activities to their goods and ideas of education. Thank you, Gail.

Gail Prenskey: Thank you, Jok. We will come back to you for more questions, but I wanted to ask Moses if he could speak about his ideas for phasing in the design and the construction plans at Promised Land Secondary School? Moses, can you unmute?

Moses Mawa: Hello. Thank you. I'm sorry to be and the dark. I am Moses and I am working alongside Jok for the secondary school. As an architect, I have been tasked and working in this context looking at the school and I challenge myself. In my land, I have to work hand-in-hand with the client or the users and go with their aspirations and dreams. The uniqueness of this design is based on (inaudible) Jok has the name for Bullets To Books and my job is how do I create a space that changes people's mindset and divert them from thinking about bullets and fighting and shooting and thinking about how to unite themselves and socialize based on the diversity of the culture around South Sudan. There are many cultures around, but how do you create the space makes that sense of togetherness.

In the design, you can see that we created a number of spaces that allow students to read in groups or individual where they can work with each other based on their diversity and have a sense of togetherness. The building has to be good in terms of sustainability. I designed it in a way (inaudible) when we look at terms, it is cheaper as we collect places around to places. We can collect water and we can easily install solar panels on top that gets energy throughout the day.

In terms of the phasing of the project, we are limited within our budget and the finances are a bit of a setback, but we have designs that we can test. That has really helped us to see what we can do with

the limited resources that we have. We have a lot of limited areas, but that does not mean we have to change the design. As you can see from the design, we have a lot of spaces, the liberatory and the library, which within the limited spaces we have, we want to see how we can use this block and we have really tried to change the liberatory. You can look at the windows showing that the building will be naturally ventilated and there will be natural light. It will run the course of the building and will be -- the design is there in the biggest achievement we are looking into is engaging the local community and to the project to get a sense of ownership.

You can see that we have some locals at the school and the construction and some students we have working elsewhere and the team on-site. We have the ownership of this is our school and we own the school. We love it and will take care of it. That is one thing that we have to celebrate as a project, and they have to get back to the users. This is the materials and a few of them are important, but we are still looking for ways to use local resources and we need to look at the foundations within.

We need to have the skills and how they can use the skill after the construction of the school. I think the school is not only to benefit the Promised Land, but the community and the country. This is within the limited budget; we have done a lot so far. We are hoping to do much as a way to find more funding. Jok is also committed and with his commitment, we are inspired and all of our American friends who are working days and nights helping things happen for Promised Land. Thank you so much.

Gail Prensky: Thank you, Moses. That was super great. Now, I want to ask a question perhaps to Jok and Lupai, if possible. It is complicated and South Sudan in terms of the effort of unifying the people. There are 64 tribes in a country of about 11 million people. How do you envision education in the effort to unify and bring peace among so many groups of people? Jok and Lupai, can you have a conversation with us about that?

Jok Abraham Thon: Yes, when we talk about a country, first of all, we need to have a civilized society. A civilized society is one that feel they belong to the society. That society can be brought up from education. We need to create a generation that is more educated from the issues around us and issues that affect the world.

I believe in a civilized society because the focus on productive businesses, that means they will be engaged in activities that are more beneficial to humanity and more activities that destroy humanity. When you look at the case of South Sudan and Africa, you find more has been affected or intimidated by uneducated young people who are exploited or used to stop democracy. Because of the illiteracy, they don't know that the wrong behavior is the one that has taught them to have willingness to be part of the democracy is what have kept them from having good (inaudible).

When I talk about education and solving conflict, I am a living example because the way that I see things is not the way some other illiterate young people see. I believe in coexistence to achieve my dreams and young people who are uneducated believe in conflict as to achieving their dreams. Education will set the young people free to be dependent thinkers, to be global transformers. This is why you see Africa is less performing and global affairs because the young people are deeply into their tribes, they are deeply into their countries, but they are not open-minded to see what are the challenges facing the world and how they can be part of it.

Bullests To Books is one of the examples because it will highlight the young people's role to see their roles in the global affairs, to be global transformers. We use education like the Promised Land Secondary School to change that. Now, we have 300 young people who are in the University. This year, 2021, we will graduate 182. These people will not go back to the communities empty-handed. They will go back filled with knowledge, filled with fresh ideas, and independent thinkers and their societies and advocates of peaceful coexistence.

When we talk about art, illiteracy does not allow arts and music because and South Sudan, we have music. When the music speaks, it is so tribalistic and is not unifying. We need to reach out the message of peaceful coexistence through music and art and that is what Lupai has been talking about before. Musicians and artists, they can send messages to speak directly. The action of art is to speak louder. This is why the project is one of the most powerful that I enjoy or I have benefited as many young people.

When Gail came to South Sudan, so many young people realized their dreams. They realize that their talents. They were able to set up the themes, production studios producing this. When young people tell the stories of other people, I think they speak better than anything.

We can hear what is thought up from the other aspect. All of us are all yearning for peace.

Lupai Stephen: I am sure everyone here -- I hope everyone here is following that as we want peace. Back to your question, we are currently running a program in the school supported by the US Embassy here in Juba. It helps us to reach out to students and teach them conflict resolution skills and leadership skills. This helps us to get to learn more about students when they are in a school set up apart from what the teachers usually tell us. How can this promote a peaceful coexistence? One thing I want to get back to is what was said, building people to people and the Diplomacy as building people to people relationships. That is a basis for building trust. This is one of the biggest platforms they use because it brings people from different communities from different tribes together, so they are under the same roof taught by the same people.

As you build trust, as you build trust and stereotypes, it becomes easier that whatever you get out of the school environment, it may not be something that you believe in. You have a mindset that is

different based on what you get in school. From a particular community, they may have a different view about another from a different place. They if they are in the same set up, they build that relationship. There are ideas that are pushed to keep people apart. In that set up of an education system or in a school set up, they build that trust and relationship. In general, it is always very hard for people -- it is hard for people to decide whether or not they are being taken to the Promised Land or if they are actually being used. The only way that they can know the way to the Promised Land is when they are enlightened and can reason for themselves. Does when they have the ability to read for themselves and not just hear what people say for them to do it. We can achieve that.

I believe that pushing for education, this is what a lot of us here are pushing on to increase the budget on education and ensure that the budget that has been allocated is fully given to ensure that there are a lot of available schools for people to attend. Pushing this gives children an alternative or a space to learn rather than just thinking about okay, I am home, schools are from my location and I just don't need to go to school, I just need to go and take care of cattle or I just need to go and far more do what I need to do. The fact that this school is available, that is out of character. As we are advocating for better schools and systems, that is a strategy for us to build trust among ourselves and also opened mindsets of those who may have already been blocked. If that makes sense.

Gail Prensky: That made a lot of sense. It is so powerful. I have a question for Andy, director of the documentary film that we did. I hope that we will do more. I wanted to ask Andy to describe that vision for that feature documentary that we are hoping to produce.

Andy Truschinski: Yes, of course, everyone had their lives interrupted by COVID. It is not an uncommon story to hear and that this is how this all started was to modify the approach.

First of all, we knew that we had enough material to at least start having the message out there. Our methodology or how we wanted to approach this was to let's put a lens up to this beautiful method to changing minds from Bullets To Books. From there, we wanted to do -- we knew there had to be some sort of conclusion there because the way that we perceive this to move forward is we want to get Jok in the context of coming here to the United States. We wanted to be able to see his mission and how it lands on Americans.

Also, just to be able to see that methodology that Jok runs by, his motto spread further to capture that for the first time. It is a beautiful thing to approach when that happens, hopefully, and this fall in any way possible to continue the message and to get it on film.

Gail Prensky: Thank you, Andy. I think we are -- we don't have any time for more questions. I just want to ask Jok to help me thank everyone for joining us today, and to the team. I have this incredible Bullets To Books team. Again, I want to thank our guest, Ambassador Hushek, they American Impact

Award, Mandela Washington Fellowship, we are so well taken care of. We need all of the support to push forward this extraordinary, global, transforming project. Please contact us. I think that we have a screen that we cannot share so that you can easily contact us. Standby just for a second. There it is. If you want to, you can hold up your smart phone and scan in that QR code. You can also write down our e-mail address. Let's just take a moment for everyone to pull out their phones and do that. I think -- we hope that you will share this as this program has been recorded. Please share the link with others. I hope that in the future, we can come back together and have more discussions. I really want to thank everyone, and I appreciate your time today.

Jok Abraham Thon: I would like to say thank you so much for those who have joined us today. Thank you for this remarkable speech that you have given and thank you to have a great opportunity that is given to us. We need more advocacy, and we need action now today, not tomorrow. We need to be global transformers. I ask all of you (inaudible) so we make our world a better place for us and in the future to come. Thank you so much to everyone who joined us today. May God bless you.