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Testimony from Duol Tungwar Kueiguong of Jericho, VT
Vermont Adult Learning student

My name is Duol Tungwar, originally from south Sudan. I was born into a family of a paramount chief with 9 wives and over 50 children. When I was a young boy, I remember whenever my father would go under the tree to resolve our community's issues, I would accompany him from morning till evening listening to how he handled complex cases. Back home in the evening, he would ask my opinion about how he ruled on the cases. I would often tell him to forgive or waive punishment and he would send his messenger to bring that person back to reduce the punishment or fines. This is something I have lived with: loving one another, protecting the less privileged, and the overall wellbeing of our world.

Then came the time the Sudanese Authorities desired to occupy the southern part of Sudan now South Sudan where we live. They wanted oil, gold, and other minerals plus agricultural lands for their food's growth since northern Sudan was desert while the south of Sudan is green and fertile. This idea led to conflict that lasted for 2.5 decades and in the process Sudanese Authorities, with financial support from big corporations seeking opportunities and profits over humanity in oils and mining, succeeded in displacing us. We were left with no hope and many lost lives, livelihood, livestock and ancestral lands. I remember one time I asked my mum when will this shelling & bombardment day and night by Russia's Antonov ever stop? Why are they fighting us when we are not fighting them? My mum would calmly say this has been happening even before she was born and my siblings were also born while on the run. From there I knew it's something to live with.

On January 23, 2000, we were forcefully taken to the frontline of the conflict to carry ammunition and it's where my hands and back were injured by a helicopter gunship and my relatives died on spot. I was airlifted with other wounded persons to Lokichoggio, Kenya by the Red Cross. After that, my country briefly gained independence before conflict started up again. I returned to Kenya, then Uganda before ending up in the US.

When I arrived here in 2023, without wasting time I got enrolled at VAL. I have always wished to study law, economic and public policy at Harvard University, MIT, Yale and Princeton. This is important to me because I believe the problems my country south Sudan faces today is the lack of a competent judicial system or rules of law. The mineral and resources are now depleted, and the environment is poisoned with oil waste and no one dares to talk about it. Those who made profits left our community to drink water with oil waste in it and that's visible through diseases affecting our people without solution today. This is a struggle that I believe must be fought by my generation.

Studying US history has inspired me and I admire the founding fathers like George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton and James Madison, and their contributions which led to the creation of this great nation called the US. It shows how a vision can start with one person, but with collective efforts, many achieve it. The US is a good example of how these leaders put the nation above their personal interest. This is something I feel my country back home should adopt, and I know it's possible because even the democratic system now widely used in the US was once for the greek and republicans a system of governance from the roman empire.

I am grateful for the hospitality, the warm welcome by the community here in Vermont, something I am still enjoying today in my community. I volunteer each week spending time teaching basic English language to the elderly, persons with disabilities and refugees mostly from East Africa - Kiswahili speakers who really need to do basic things independently. I love the US for giving my life a second chance and my wish is one day to meet my family and the community not with a bag full of clothes or money, but with the education I am building now.

I would like to thank the people of this state, the leadership and Vermont Adult Learning's team for their tireless effort and for believing in us. Without you, this journey wouldn't have been possible.

Duol Tungwar Kueigguong
A colorful journey in the opposite continents.