Providing Support in ‘No Man’s Land’

The following interview was conducted on January 3, 2014. Mr. Jennings’ opinions are in no way reflective of his organization.

The Republic of South Sudan has experienced a difficult transition since declaring its independence in 2011. Salisbury University alumnus Trent Jennings ’04 is one of scores of workers with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who have traveled to the war-torn region in an attempt to comfort and restore the massive displaced populace.

A 2004 graduate of SU’s Conflict Analysis and Dispute Resolution Program, Jennings has been traveling across the world providing aid to people in unstable regions for more than a decade.

“During my summer and winter breaks, I was fortunate to intern overseas in both Macedonia and Kosovo,” he said. “My professor, Brian Polkinghorn, was very encouraging of his students to expand their experiences while utilizing skills and theories taught in class. During my stints abroad, I worked with many different organizations in different capacities such as livelihoods and income-generating projects, community development, refugee/internationally displaced people (IDP) issues and mediation. My time at Salisbury gave me the confidence that I could make a difference in the world if I gave it a chance.”

Recently, Jennings has been based in the Abyei area referred to as “no man’s land.” The region was traditionally a bridge between the Republic of Sudan and what is now South Sudan.

“I had lived in Kenya a few years back and was eager to go back to Africa,” he said. “I was also quite interested in another region in an attempt to comfort and restore the massive displaced populace.

“The areas that are experiencing some of the heaviest fighting currently have very little infrastructure around them,” he said. “They are not easy to access in the dry season usually, and for reporters right now to see what is happening on the ground is close to impossible.”

Jennings suggested that being informed and open to the complexities many emerging African nations are now facing could go a long way.

“There is a lot of history between the many tribes here in South Sudan,” he said. “We cannot just simplify a conflict and say it is an ethnic/tribal conflict of Dinka versus Nuer, or a political conflict of president Salva Kiir versus ex-vice president Machar. These elements are fueling the fire, but as in all conflicts there are a collection of factors. We need to continue to learn and create an area for dialogue within South Sudan – there is so much complexity in South Sudan with an array of cultures, tribes and languages.

“I would ask people to continue to learn about what is going on in South Sudan, Darfur, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Chad and Sudan. This is a volatile area of Africa and it needs international attention. I think people taking an interest will help guide anyone that wishes to make donations, volunteer or speak out on humanitarian issues.”