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de Sœur Emmanuelle

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LETTER TO FRIENDS OF SISTER EMMANUELLE

N°111

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"When two cultures meet, not in a clash but getting together shoulder to shoulder, a revolution can happen where everyone grows in humanity"

Dear friends,

At this critical juncture for Sudan, we can only hope that the words of Sister Emmanuelle here above will apply to the populations of North and South.

In this letter, you will find a brief account of my visit to Khartoum last December, and an invitation to our next Extraordinary General Meeting.

PLEBISCITE FOR THE INDEPENDENCE OF SOUTH SUDAN

Almost 99% of southern Sudanese have voted for independence in the referendum for self-determination in January.

The referendum was the key point of the peace agreement signed in 2005 by the Khartoum government and the south Sudanese rebels to end two decades of civil war.

Nearly four million voters had registered for this historic election, with about 3.8 million in southern Sudan. The southern Sudanese living in the South, but also those residing in the North or abroad, had the right to participate in this poll.



Despite this electoral success, the leaders of South Sudan have refrain from triumphalism and called on voters not to hold celebrations that could be interpreted by the North as a provocation.

The international community has hailed this vote that is paving the way for the birth of a new State in Africa. The United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has highlighted the *"great success"* of the referendum and praised the governments of Khartoum and southern Sudan *"for having fulfilled their commitment to maintain peace and stability during this crucial period"*.

The United States considered that this *"historic"* referendum marked the coming of a *"new era in the region."* As for the EU, it is already contemplating *"the building of a close and long term partnership with the South Sudan"*, a region which is rich in oil.

The Sudanese President Omar Hassan al-Bashir, who is likely to lose much of its oil revenues after the referendum, has urged creditor countries to cancel debt. *"Sudan has just emerged from civil war and it*

is clear that it deserves preferential treatment from its creditor countries," he said on January 19, at the Arab economic summit held in the Egyptian resort of Sharm el Sheikh.

Actually, the South, mostly Christian and animist, contains 70% of oil deposits, but the refineries and the pipelines necessary to export crude oil are passing through the North.

The independence of Southern Sudan should be proclaimed on July 9th.

The northern authorities and the southern ones (headed by Salva Kiir, a former leader of the military wing of the main southern rebel movement during the war) have yet to agree on the distribution of oil revenues, and to settle the status issue of the border region of Abyei, which soil contains large reserves of hydrocarbons.

MY VISIT TO KHARTOUM FROM 13 TO 18 DECEMBER 2010

General Situation

My last visits to Khartoum were precisely 3 and 5 years ago.

The visit in 2005 was at the time the peace agreement was being signed.

The atmosphere then was entirely different that of today.

This time, the mood was rather depressed: the separation of states was forecasted, the northern politicians were threatening, many southerners were "packing their bags" (30,000 in the previous fortnight), and those who remained were anxious.



Thousands of displaced people in the camp of Gabarona (1 hour from Khartoum) have been waiting several days for trucks of the Southern Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission.

Since the primary sector has not been a priority during this period, and the government relies only on market pressures to control prices (at least for products it considers unimportant), the price of some basic necessities has doubled or tripled in the last five years.

But the majority of the very poorest people have no more work than they had before, and if they do have a job, their wage has not kept up with price rises.

In short, one thing is certain: the poor are now poorer than they were before the war, and the number of street children is rising all the time in the capital.

While the future of the SVP is uncertain in such a fluctuating environment, its work is more important than ever in northern Sudan, where Southerners risk once again being entirely forgotten.

The financial situation of SVDP

- In one week, the exchange rate against the euro went from 1€ / 3.1 SD to around 4 SD within the official banking system. This devaluation was officially announced as a temporary measure, but is good news for us, since we gain 29% purchasing power. There are two drawbacks: no one knows how long this situation will last, and the rise in the price of imported goods as a result will have an overall inflationary effect.

- In June we had drawn up a tight budget, assuming that costs would remain stable from 2009. But inflation over the year has been so high that, in December, SVDP was facing a very tight cash flow situation.

We had to react quickly and use our reserves to fill the gap which, notwithstanding the current favourable exchange rate, still represented 11% of the 2010 budget.

Moreover, in order to finance the maintenance of the two farms for our teenagers in Gebel Awlia, ASASE has transferred 46 300 CHF that have already been used to purchase and install three water tanks, the boundary fence of the two farms, as well as the irrigation system for Dar Juan Matha, the electricity connections needed, a safety barrier for the well, and the extra showers requested.

(For your information, you can see on our website portraits of thirty teenagers who were there on the day of my visit to Gebel Awlia: <http://www.asase.org/e/actionsEnfantsRue.php>).

Mobilising donors

- ASASE at once began contacting potential donors to refill the coffers and ensure future needs.

We count on the support of all our friends!

- In January 2011, the Swiss government has renewed its support, providing, through its embassy in Khartoum, 6 tons of powdered milk for our Babies Feeding program.

- Our Austrian friends from Caritas showed us their unswerving support: the Sudan being a priority country for Caritas, Caritas Graz has transferred 33 000 CHF to fund a further baby feeding centre in 2011, as well as the two they have already funded in 2010. This undertaking for 3 centres is extended to 2012 and 2013 as well! The donation from Caritas Graz, which has enabled us to feed 989 children in 2010, will now benefit over 1500 children!

Mr Heller has decided to renew his donation for the Ferdinand centre in 2011.

Finally 10 computers have been delivered to the Haj Youssif farm, for training 70 teenagers. The Austrian Government funded these (8 000 CHF), through Caritas.

- Our Spanish friends Solidaridad Internacional Trinitaria agreed to give 40 000 CHF for the replacement of the old school bus that conveys the youth of both Gebel Awlia farms.

Trimming sails in 2011

While waiting for the results of the ASASE committee's fund-raising work, some news, sometimes linked to the dramatic changes the country is going through, have come in as a welcome reduction of costs:

- In January 2011, 244 young people have left our Street Children program: 70 because they have reached majority, 174 because they followed the mass exodus to the south, where they preferred to return (when they had family) before the partition of the country.

They left in haste, often without our knowing (SVDP cannot lock them up nor constrain them), and sometimes not definitely: some have already returned after a few days. Here is the present breakdown of the 290 children still taken care of:

Homes or farms	Number of children
Gebel Awlia I (farm)	74 boys
Dar Juan Matha (farm)	119 boys
Haj Youssif (farm)	38 boys
Ferdinand Home (home)	13 boys
Mayo (home)	12 girls
El Takamul (home)	18 girls
Sahafa (home)	16 girls
Total	290



Joseph Parami, 11 years old, 1st year of primary school, Gebel Awlia I farm

The Haj Youssif farm should be closed this year. Its current occupants will join their peers in the Gebel Awlia farms.

Some teens who heard about this closure have sold beds and mattresses to nearby residents.

- One of the four Friday clinics, Square 9, at Haj Youssif, was closed, following the building of a hospital nearby. This clinic provided 3500 consultations in 2009.

- During my brief stay, eight employees of SVDP asked to resign, and five others did it in early February.

These numerous departures are due to the combined effect of the country's political situation and the internal wage policy.

For those who, for many years, have had difficulty making ends meet with the wages paid by SVDP, this was the now or never time to return to the South.

The fate of Southerners remaining in the North is at best uncertain, at worst threatened.

When I was in Khartoum, every day, statements from Arab officials hinted at the consequences of secession for the remaining Southerners in the North: they will become "second class citizens," said Al Tahir, Speaker of the Assembly; they will be totally "stripped of their citizenship", according to Kamal Obeid, Minister of Information, "they will lose jobs and aid, will not be authorized to sell or buy on the market in Khartoum, nor to be treated in hospitals. "

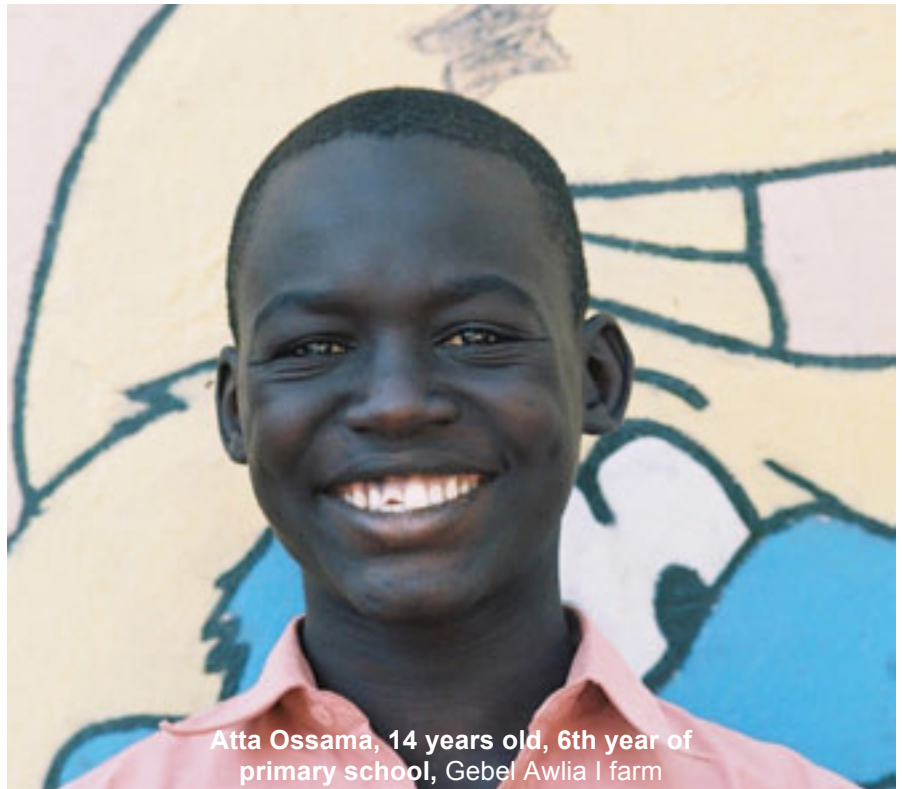
Although these threats, which were aimed to deter secessionists, have since been contradicted (after acceptance of the results) by a recent statement of President Bashir in a local newspaper, they have had a real effect on the target population.

Meeting with the consultants commissioned by Asmae-Sister Emmanuelle

- The last day we had a meeting with the independent consultant hired by our French friends from Asmae for an assessment mission of the Street Children program.

- We heard some initial feed-back of his draft report. The meeting went very well, and his thorough audit work can only help us, at this apparent turning point for SVDP, to better understand our strengths and improve what can be done.

- Mainly, the "natural" reduction of the scale of our programs in the North should help us improve the physical care of our children and strengthen their psychosocial support.



Atta Ossama, 14 years old, 6th year of primary school, Gebel Awlia I farm

- To get there, one of the priorities this year will be to raise the salaries in order to take into account the actual needs of the current team, and to enable the hiring of more qualified personnel without causing a discrepancy with long-time employees.

For the present scope of monthly salaries in SVDP is ranging from 85 to 400 CHF, with an average of 265 CHF. Hence the difficulties SVDP is facing when it tries to recruit social workers, with a starting salary two times lower than that proposed by state agencies, and 4 or 5 times lower than that proposed by international NGOs!

EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

We invite all members of the Swiss Association of Friends of Sister Emmanuelle to attend the Extraordinary General Meeting that will be held

**Friday, March 25th at 18:00 at the Cénacle
17 Promenade Charles-Martin, 1208 Geneva (Malagnou)**

The following items will be voted on in this order:

1) Membership of ASASE

According to the statutes of the association, members are supposed to show *"a real and continuous interest for the purpose of the association."* In fact, this condition, which is primary to our eyes, has been replaced by a more objective one: the minimum annual contribution.

In addition, the payment of the minimum annual contribution, set at CHF 20 by the statutes, has not been systematically reminded to the members for many years, because of the costs of the mailings and reminders.

Now, experience has shown that an average of less than 2 members out of thousand are attending our General Meetings.

This brought us to reconsider our relationship with our members and donors, and we decided to propose to your vote, at our next Extraordinary General Meeting, the following amendments to the statutes (see new article 5 attached):

- The membership status will no longer depend on the payment of a contribution to the association (subscriptions), but will require a written request that the committee will accept or turn down.
- The association gives up the collection of yearly dues from its members. The association leaves it to each one to pay whatever he wants to fund the programs of the association.

The donors who wish to support our association without getting involved in its functioning, and who therefore do not wish to remain or become "members", de facto become "friends" of the association.

As such, they will still be regularly informed of the activities and projects of the association through our quarterly newsletters and our website www.asase.org that is providing updated information.

We would be grateful to tell us, by returning the reply slip below, if you wish to remain a member of the association.

Reply-slip to send us back

By mail: ASASE 19, rue du Rhône - 1204 Genève or by fax : 022 310 21 93

✂-----

I / we wish to **remain a member** of the association

Name / Company name: _____ First name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____

Date:

Signature:

2) Other statutory changes

We took this opportunity to conduct a comprehensive review of our statutes. These changes are proposed in the attached appendix to allow you to familiarised yourself with them before the GA. We would be grateful if you could kindly submit any possible question in writing before the meeting. A vote will take place at the EGM for acceptance of the new 2011 version of the statutes.



Many thanks to Kamal and his team for their warm welcome.

Again and again THANK YOU, dear friends, for your loyal support.

Without the courage and dedication of Kamal and his team on site, and without your generosity and perseverance, the lives of tens of thousands of people in Sudan will be even worse.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Patrick Bittar'.

Patrick Bittar
Director