



Association suisse des Amis
de Soeur Emmanuelle

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LETTER TO THE FRIENDS OF SISTER EMMANUELLE

N° 84

January 2003

Dear friend,

Christmas has passed and I have not been able to offer you my best wishes as I usually do. Please forgive me and accept, a little late, my best wishes for a very happy New Year.

I confess to a good deal of reluctance in seeking your financial help so early in the year. I am aware that 2002 has been a particularly difficult year and that the prospects for 2003 are not promising. In addition, the Christmas festivities, which will have placed significant demands on your wallets and credit cards, are only just behind you. And, alas, are we not often confronted *even on our own doorsteps* with unbearable suffering and inundated with requests from organisations doing an excellent job to alleviate it? What right do I have, therefore, to ask you once again for your help for the inhabitants of a country so far away in a continent that appears doomed to eternal misfortune?

I have, sometimes, a bad conscience, I assure you... But, there it is: It is almost 23 years ago now that I got involved personally in helping Sister Emmanuelle in her work among those living in the rubbish dumps of Cairo. And later on, with Sister Emmanuelle's blessing, I became involved in supporting Kamal, who had decided to give up everything to help "displaced persons" resulting from the civil war in Sudan. I shall continue to support this cause, as long as the need exists, to the extent this is possible.

So here I am once again forced to turn to you for your help since private donations have fallen by some 30% these past few years. We have been able to make up part of this shortfall thanks to donations received from other Associations or Foundations. However, last year our Association had a large deficit and our sister Associations in France, Austria and Belgium are also in the same boat. An extra-ordinary meeting of Presidents took place in Paris on the 2nd of December in the presence of Sister Emmanuelle. While this was a very useful get together it also showed up the limits of our actions.

Unless we are able to stem the current very soon we shall have no choice but to scale down our programmes significantly...and, like all surgical operations, this will hurt the patient! So there we are: if you find that you are able to help us without it hindering your assistance to those in need in your immediate neighbourhood please do so! But if you simply cannot, do not have a bad conscience, for God will bless you for whatever you are doing.

The object of my appeal is the following: if each one of you would make known to others what our Association is and what it is doing thanks to Sister Emmanuelle, we would be able to enlarge the circulation of our newsletters and become known by a wider public. We need very much to be able to contact new generous people willing to make a donation from time to time to support our activities,

because, over the past 23 years, our mailing list has become dated. Tell your friends about our Association and give us their names and addresses. **The Good Lord will do the rest.**

News from Sudan

Kamal gave me some rejoicing news just before Christmas.

1. The infant feeding programme, at Gabarone, which was started last year, is working very well and more than 1200 children are being fed five times a week as are the 600 babies in Kalakla and the 200 others living with their mothers in the Sudanese ladies prison. These meals cost only 25 Swiss centimes each and provide these infants with a more adequate physical and mental development. This was a good decision taken by our Committee before even knowing where the funds to finance it would come from and drawing yet again on our reserves!
2. Thanks to donations received from Caritas Carinthie (Austria), Operation Orange (the South West of France) and the promise of a donation from the city of Geneva we have been able to finance a fourth home for young girl orphans. These girls were in a deplorable condition when they were rescued from the streets but their health has greatly improved and they are often seen smiling and laughing. Kamal tells me that if only we could find the necessary funds he would be ready to open a new home again this year. He is unstoppable our Kamal!
3. The new farm that was opened in Jebel Awlia, financed in total by the English St. Vincent de Paul Society, has been able to take in 97 young boys of which 50 have been "bequeathed" (!!) to us by the Ministry of Social Affairs. Examinations carried out by our medical team diagnosed that many of them are suffering from bilharziasis, a common illness in the Nile valley, and others from skin infections. They are now undergoing treatment for these diseases. We trust that this new farm will also serve as a catalyst for the creation of a community centre to help the displaced persons of the Jebel Awlia camp. Our dream is to create a vocational training centre modelled on the one we have in Gabarona.
4. A survey carried out recently among the older children and adults having benefited from the training provided in Gabarona gives us grounds for real satisfaction. Whether it is the people who qualified with a diploma in electrical work or sewing, in bricklaying or carpentry, more than 70% of them can now provide for themselves by earning a small wage or working from time to time. Of the 266 people who followed one of our training programmes last year, exactly 167 now earn a reasonable living.
5. The project to provide drinking water for the displaced persons in the Omdurman camp continues: we deliver a total of 211,200 litres of drinking water to this camp every day.
6. Our last batch of medical supplies, financed partly by the Canton of Geneva, arrived in Khartoum at the end of November. A big thank you to all those who, through their contributions, allow this vital programme to continue.

As you already know, the feeding programme for the 52,000 pupils who attend our schools (*rakubas*) was not able to be continued when the new school year started last June. Three-quarters of the children eat nothing at recreation time because their parents are too poor to provide them with anything. Archbishop Wako of Khartoum insists, nevertheless, that the children's parents have their part to play in feeding their children and that provision of food financed by the church or non-governmental organisations should be restricted to only those in the most urgent need. Presumably a well thought-out decision dictated largely by the impossibility of providing a meal to **all** the children.

MICHEL BITTAR
President