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LETTER TO THE FRIENDS OF SISTER EMMANUELLE

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Dear friend,

Our Jean-Claude François, accustomed to the damp heat and lush vegetation of Haiti, has just returned wide-eyed from a visit to discover, first-hand, something about our programmes in Sudan. Never could he have imagined such sandy desolation and such misery...

Our committee had proposed this initiation visit since there is nothing more effective than to have someone look at the way we do things with a fresh eye; this can work miracles and, in fact, Jean-Claude came back not only full of images and with many photographs but with new, interesting ideas on several of the programmes.... How to improve it... what priority it should be accorded when funds are in short supply... how best to monitor it, etc..

But let us hear it in Jean-Claude's own words: Here is his report written in the form of a note for the committee

Every year thousands of people, the majority Christians or Animists, leave the war-torn south of the country for neighbouring countries such as Ethiopia, Uganda and Zaire. Around half a million refugees have left the country since 1989.

Most people, however, do not have the means to pay the passage to the border and for these the torment begins: they generally set off in the direction of Khartoum. They do not all make it since many die of hunger or as a result of injuries on the way. Some are arrested, imprisoned or even sold as slaves. Human Rights organisations have confirmed that three thousand women and children live in slavery in farms in the South-West of the country. Fortunately there is no known organised slave trade although one NGO does specialise in buying back such slaves. What can one think of that? The pros and cons may balance out, although the action which gains freedom for one person might encourage militias to take even more slaves as a continuing source of income!

Those who finally make it to Khartoum find themselves crammed, often forcibly, into camps. There are over two million people at present trying to survive in camps for displaced persons – vast wastelands situated tens of kilometres outside the capital without any infrastructure (water, electricity, telephone, means of transport, hospitals). The people live there with their children, below the poverty line, in small mud huts that they build themselves, sometimes consisting of just one room. The houses need to be rebuilt every year since they are torn down by the wind and rain (it rains for about three months each year).

Question to Barnabas who was rebuilding his house with cardboard and old bits of cloth he had found in rubbish bins in Khartoum: “Why don’t you build your house with mud like your neighbours?” Answer: “Our houses and fields were burnt down and our land stolen in the South. Now I don’t have the strength anymore. In any case when the property developers decide they need this land we will be pushed even further into the desert by the police without any compensation and there we will be forced to rebuild”.

Sister Emmanuelle in Khartoum

The only support and help these people receive is from the churches and aid organisations. In all the camps around the capital, the Swiss Association of Friends of Sister Emmanuelle, through the intermediary of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, provides an enormous amount of assistance to this population in distress:

- Looks after orphan children or children whose parents are in prison
- Looks after children whose parents are unable to provide for them
- Provides free schooling and vocational training for children
- Provides vocational training for adults
- Provides healthcare for children and adults (mobile clinics)
- Provides drinking water in many of the camps
- Provides a supplementary feeding programme for very small children

Organisation of Work

Under the highly efficient supervision of Kamal, a staff of 144 people divided among the camps, the farms, the homes and the office in Khartoum looks after the displaced persons. The work is organised as follows:

- Girls and boys under the age of twelve are looked after in eight homes – four for girls and four for boys – on the outskirts of Khartoum. A total of 200 children stay in these homes. Some were born in the camps while others were rescued from begging and prostitution in the streets of Khartoum.
- From the age of twelve the boys are transferred to farms which are true vocational training centres where they have the choice of seven different trades: electrical skills, cattle rearing, agriculture, bricklaying, sewing, carpentry and refrigeration. A total of 524 adolescents live in the four farms near Khartoum.
- These children are all fed, housed and attend school. In case of illness they are cared for in the homes and farms and, if necessary, admitted into hospital. Two health carers, equipped with mobile clinics, visit each home, farm and parish school at least once a week and carry out 1300 consultations per month.
- A food programme for children between 6 months and 5 years was initiated in many of the camps in 2001. This programme caters for a real need by providing a supplementary meal each day for those children whose parents have no work and no income. At present, a total of 2100 children (1400 boys and 700 girls) receive this meal each day in our food centres but the demand is growing. For most of the children it is their only meal of the day. There are even some who secretly take home to their mothers some of the food they receive.

- Wells have been bored in many of the camps and water tankers deliver this water free of charge to the population. Several adult training centres have been created in order to help both men and women learn some skill over a 6-month period which will help them find work more easily. A total of 850 adults are taking advantage of such training. In addition to the seven trades mentioned earlier, special training in medical care has been conducted for 120 people who will eventually act as health care assistants in the camps.

Notes of hope

Between 1994 and 2003 a total of 1214 young people received vocational training certificates. Between 2000 and 2002, 324 young people left the centres with the necessary practical training to find work. Some of these “graduates” have actually returned to work benevolently in these centres.

At the Buri centre there are currently 197 young people between 16 and 18 years of age who will be taking school-leaving certificate examinations this year. These have all learned a trade and are virtually ready to make their own way in the world.

Notes on my visit to Sudan
16 to 24 January 2003

Jean-Claude François

To all our readers and donors I take advantage of this letter to wish you all a very happy and holy Easter season together with a well-earned rest away from the scenes of war and horror which the world’s media seems to delight in showering upon us.

ON A MORE CONSTRUCTIVE AND HOPEFUL NOTE it would appear that serious, high-level negotiations have been taking place at different times in Cairo and Nairobi between the warring factions to try to secure peace. Hassan Beshir, the Sudanese President has met with Garang, the revolutionary leader. The war in Iraq, and the determination shown by the USA, has, no doubt, contributed to these attempts at reconciliation. God knows how to bring good out of bad and such a development would be a reason for rejoicing and thanksgiving...

Wouldn’t it be wonderful if our activities in Sudan had no reason to continue...

Here is some news which may interest our readers:

Sister Emmanuelle prunes the Vine of Peace

During the Eucharist the wine is transformed into the blood of Christ and this symbolises the gift of the Son of God to man. Wine comes from grapes and its taste depends as much on the exposure of the grapes to the sun as it does on those who tend them. In Saillon, Valais, there is a tiny vineyard – in fact with only three vines it is the smallest in the world – which has been pruned by personalities who have staked their all on what is best in human nature: **Farinet’s vineyard.**

Farinet was the great-hearted forger, the outlaw who distributed his coins to the most deprived – a Swiss Robin Hood. In search of justice his legend became a symbol of the freedom of mountain dwellers.

The fruit of this vine has a unique taste: it releases a fragrance of hope and charity. The blending of the wine from this vineyard with the best wine from the Valais yields one thousand numbered bottles the sale of which provides 20,000 euros each year for children in distress.

Among the “Pilgrims of Hope” who have pruned this vine as large as the Little Prince’s planet are the Abbé Pierre, the champion of the homeless, and Guy Gilbert, priest of the hooligans. It is now the turn of the one who has dedicated her life to the poorest children of the slums of Cairo and Khartoum to prune the **Vine of Peace**. This is how the friends of Farinet wish to express their gratitude to **Sister Emmanuelle** for all that she has achieved.

All the friends of Sister Emmanuelle are welcome to participate in this ceremony. It will take place on **Thursday 22 May at 12 noon in Saillon**.

For more information please contact Marie-Claire Ricou, tel.: 022 3480379

Annual General Meeting

We invite all members of the Association of Friends of Sister Emmanuelle to participate in its Annual General Meeting which will be held on:

Wednesday 21 May at 8pm
at the Cercle de l’Espérance
8, rue de la Chapelle (Eaux Vives), Geneva

Sister Emmanuelle will again honour us with her presence.

We hope many of you will be able to participate in these events and we look forward to seeing you.

MICHEL BITTAR
President