



Association suisse des Amis
de Soeur Emmanuelle

19, rue du Rhône
1204 Genève
T: +41 (0)22 311 20 22
F: + 41 (0)22 310 21 93
info@asase.org
www.asase.org

LETTER TO THE FRIENDS OF SISTER EMMANUELLE

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Dear friend,

The news from Sudan is good, but from Haiti it is rather bad. If Jean-Claude and I had not been brought up in the school of Sister Emmanuelle, who does not allow herself to be beaten and who often quotes the axiom of Marcus Aurelius: "*Obstacles stimulate action*" we might well feel discouraged.

Let us start with Sudan:

Since his return to the country Kamal has sent us most encouraging news.

- 1) On his arrival back Kamal immediately set about extending the *Infant feeding programme* from 2500 children to almost 3000. There was a crying need and it seemed to us intolerable that some infants could be dying with hunger while we still had reserves in the bank. A supplementary feeding programme seven days a week has started in Karya where the authorities have demolished thousands of huts in the interests of urban planning. A similar programme will start very soon in Mandella Mayo for 300 babies.
- 2) *Vocational Training* continues to go very well and this programme receives most favourable comments from visitors. The French embassy, following an official request from Kamal and after staff of the embassy had examined the project on the spot, appears to have agreed to cover one year's operational costs for five workshops in our farm at Hag Youssif and six in the Romly centre (USD 77,000.-). We are awaiting actual payment of the sum promised before really celebrating!! In addition, Kamal has received some special funds from England together with a letter of encouragement from a high-ranking member of the St. Vincent de Paul Society for Africa, full of praise for our work and the results achieved which had been verified by visitors. On 31 July more than 900 people who had been trained in our four centres at Gabarona (seven workshops) received their diplomas. Meanwhile, the enrolment of newcomers is already underway. On 20 July the Archbishop blessed the centre at Wad el Bashir in a fine ceremony during which Mr. Stanislas Moga, the person in charge of vocational training, stated in his report read before the assembly that almost 2500 people had been trained in the Gabarona workshops of which 1700 have since been able to make a living thanks to the training they received.

A story to gladden the heart: Three youths who had been trained to repair bicycles managed to each earn the equivalent of USD 20.- which allowed them to pay for their schooling for the pride and joy of their parents!

- 3) *Homes and Farms*: Following the recommendation of our committee, Kamal has taken a total of 92 adults out of the homes and farms to make place available for younger ones and 74 others will be asked to leave shortly. To help the adults start this new stage in their lives they are each offered the equivalent of USD 60.- along with their farewell handshake. Some of the ones now leaving have spent almost 15 years in our care since being rescued from the streets!
- 4) *The schools (Rakubas)* have reopened and all our orphans have been enrolled and are attending classes. Since the Sudanese Church is no longer in a position (alas!) to provide for the thousands of children a daily meal together with school material, we will from now on finance these needs for the children from our homes.
- 5) *Grants to university students*: You will recall, no doubt, that, we were forced to discontinue the practice of providing grants to finance the university studies of our orphans. The numbers successfully passing their university entrance examinations were continually increasing and we were faced with having to make a painful choice between this programme and some of the more urgent programmes such as the supplementary food project for babies. However, hard to believe as it might be, a miracle took place. The Norwegian protestant church, in collaboration with Sudan Aid, undertook a firm commitment to finance the university studies not only of our present students **but also of all those who will in the future manage to pass their university entrance examinations in whatever faculty they choose!** The registration fees will be paid directly to the faculties concerned based on a list provided each year by the St. Vincent de Paul Society. The grants provided to the students will satisfy the minimum requirements for public universities. This news hit us like a bomb!! What an encouragement for our children and it is hard not to see in this a sign from heaven - a wink from the Good Lord.

Kamal has sent us the following information on the current status of this programme.

We currently pay the registration fees, together with transport expenses and a small stipend to cover basic necessities to 45 students plus nine others sponsored by a generous private donor. We also pay registration fees and transport expenses but without any living allowance to 14 other students. We have asked the Norwegian church and Sudan Aid to take over the financing of all these 68 students. We have also asked them to finance 54 additional candidates who have gained entrance to university for whom we were not in a position to provide any help. For completeness we can say that 14 young people have already successfully completed their university course and are no longer in our charge. In fact some of them are working without pay for the St. Vincent de Paul Society in gratitude for the help they have received.

These are extremely satisfactory results, all things considered, for which we can be justly proud.

Turning now to Haiti:

The management of activities in the field has deteriorated since Jean-Claude's departure and the reason is simple: the people left in charge were not up to the task. Happily, there has been no misuse of funds but, just to give an example, the money which was sent to a bank several months ago for the drilling of some wells is still in the account and nothing of what had been agreed has been carried out.

We have received two separate reports on the situation. Both are negative and disturbing with regard to the future of our projects set up with such difficulty and of so much potential socio-economic benefit to the local population! One report came from someone of goodwill who was unable to provide much detail since he spent only 48 hours there and had not been able to meet the people in charge. The other report was requested by us from the executive director of a Haitian NGO involved in socio-political affairs. This NGO is very active in the social development of the Central Plain and has already taken on board a number of our ideas in establishing similar projects to ours for the benefit of the local population.

In summary we are informed that:

- The governing board of the Cosmos Foundation is no longer functioning
- The health programme has faced problems of co-ordination and follow-up
- The technical college (Polytec) is confronted with co-ordination and management problems and problems with the curriculum
- The Mutual Credit Bank of Haiti (MCH) is facing problems relating to its rules and statutes
- However, the construction project (Bati-Brique) was so successful that it has been adopted by others and is now flying on its own wings.

We had our suspicions that all was not well but we lacked precise information. ***We even suspended our financial contributions to Haiti-Cosmos at the beginning of this year waiting to evaluate the situation more clearly.***

The director of the NGO in question passed through Geneva this Summer and we had a long discussion with him to see whether it might be possible to establish a partnership between Haiti-Cosmos and his organisation. It was decided that, following his return to Haiti, he would provide us with a report on the real state of our projects and put forward some suggestions.

In spite of this worrying news the report received in the meanwhile from this person has spurred us into **believing that we can eventually save the main elements of the most important projects and even further develop them.** Jean-Claude and his wife are leaving for a short stay in Haiti where they hope to sign a co-operation agreement with this NGO to revitalise our projects. During our discussions we agreed that we needed precise answers to our questions in order to make serious decisions. For the moment, with the elements already in our possession, we think that-

- 1) The *Health Centres* and the medicinal plant project could be saved and even expanded.
- 2) *Polytec* could scale down its agricultural teaching section.
- 3) Jean Claude has, with our approval, resigned from his position as Vice-President of MCH and left the business to Brother Armand who obtains funds from Europe and elsewhere.
- 4) *Bati-Brique* has no reason to continue since, having made its mark, this NGO, among others, has already constructed several buildings using this technique and taking advantage of the training we gave to the young people of Hinche. We shall hand over to this NGO all our material to allow them to continue to train young people in this technique.
- 5) Finally we believe we might have found an alternative solution for the organisation of the *Cosmos Foundation and its governing board.*

When Jean-Claude and Amalia-Eléna get back from Haiti, I trust we shall have all the information to make whatever decisions are necessary. J.Cl. and I are agreed that unless there is a serious possibility of satisfactorily saving any particular project we shall not hesitate to cut off further financial support. However we feel convinced that we will not get to this point.

In conclusion I should like to say that: We have always strove to maintain total transparency in our work and we have kept you informed not only of the successes but also of the setbacks that we face, and will continue to face in our work. We are aware that we must remain vigilant in order not to become numbed with self-satisfaction. That is why we constantly strive to adapt our approach in order to ensure the effectiveness of our work on behalf of our poorest brothers.

WE FEEL INTIMATELY CONVINCED THAT THE LORD WILL CONTINUE TO BLESS OUR ENDEAVOURS. WITH SISTER EMMANUELLE WE SAY "YALLAH! LET'S GO"

MICHEL BITTAR
President