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de Soeur Emmanuelle

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LETTER TO THE FRIENDS OF SISTER EMMANUELLE

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Dear friend,

NEWS FROM SUDAN :

Kamal has let us know that 180 orphans, whom we accommodated since their childhood, have finally left our farms and homes to fend for themselves. We thus conform to the laws of the country, these young people having reached the age they were to leave us. Our goal is not to turn out perpetually assisted adults, but people able to stand on their own feet. Moreover, their departure makes room for some other younger orphans.

Besides they all received an education and vocational training which should enable them to survive: A sum of \$100 was also given to each one of them as a farewell gift. We will keep touch with them as much as possible, and try to help them solve problems they might face. Several of them are active within SVDP and spend some of their time training younger ones.

We have 122 university students and there will soon be forty more.

Kamal has informed us that more than 3000 children under four years old are now fed everyday in our 11 centres. During the first days of their arrival, these small kids often look unhappy, weak and starving. But after a few days, they begin to smile, and then very quickly turn into merry and noisy children, running and jumping everywhere. Kamal described to me his visit to the four OMDURMAN camps where this program takes place. He noticed a blind man who was holding a baby in his arms, so skinny that you could count the bones of its chest. Kamal talked to the blind man: the mother had died, leaving him alone with the baby and two other children who were there, next to him. This case, which is not so rare, shows how urgently these children need our help.

The priest of a Khartoum North parish asked Kamal to set up a similar program in a derelict suburb, but he did not start it yet because he wanted to make it sure we will find the necessary funds... We will consider this request when we draw up our 2004 budget.

All our other programs are working well and without particular problems.

As planned, Kamal is experimenting with various small projects in order to generate funds locally. In his last report, he gives us some news about these endeavours:

- *Computer training centre:* We have bought 5 computers and we plan to give courses to our orphans who are in governmental schools, as computer skill is at present part of their curriculum. Courses with admission fees will also be given to interested people.
- *Grain mill:* This is already working, which makes it possible to provide our community with ground cereals, and allows us to save some money.
- *Drinking water sales:* We are about to start selling water from our farm in Mayo. A sample was approved by the town's sanitary authorities.
- *Fish sales:* We bought some fresh fish from the Nile in the South, and carried it up to the capital. A 6000 kilos batch was received and sold. We still have to cope with several logistical problems, and though the operation proved to be finally profitable, it is too early to say if it will be continued.
- *Livestock:* We did likewise with cattle, importing it from the South to sell it in the north of Sudan. We hope to tell you more about this in our next report.
- *Dairy:* We are studying this project.

As you can conclude from the above, SVDP is not satisfied with simply managing as best it can the welfare projects financed by our friends from Europe, it also strives to study and set up many micro-projects that could enable the population to fend for themselves in future.

NEWS FROM HAITI:

Mr Jacques Nerfin reports:

In the previous letter of the Swiss Association of Friends of Sister Emmanuelle (Oct 2003, n° 86), we reported that, since January 2002 when Jean Claude François and Dr Amalia-Elena Pasteur returned from Haiti, the management of the on-site activities had deteriorated. During the last six months, we have received three reports on the various projects, written by outside visitors who are not members of Haiti-Cosmos; one of these audits was commissioned by the Swiss Association of Friends of Sister Emmanuelle. They were all quite critical. Jean Claude and Amalia-Elena went back to Hinche for one month in order to verify the state of the projects and to try to reorganize the activities.

The following is a summary of the situation of our various projects, as well as the urgent recovery actions which have been taken.

A-THE SITUATION IN 2003

1. The Mutual Credit Bank of Haiti (CMH)

Between the creation of the CMH by Haiti-Cosmos in 1995 and 2002, two commercial banks and a dozen cooperatives started operations in the central Plateau of Haiti. The cooperatives, some of which recycled funds generated by drug trafficking, **were paying interest rates of up to 15% per month on savings, and were charging 20% per month on loans.** These excesses led to the closure of all those cooperatives that could honour neither the interests nor the deposits anymore. Last summer, their managers had to flee to escape reprisals from customers who had lost all their savings; some of these are up to their eyes in debt, others even mortgaged the houses where they live with their family.

These events have significantly contributed to a loss of Fr 21' 600 for 2002. The number of members for the six agencies has fallen from 2500 to 1600 people. The total amount of new loans, as well as reimbursements, has also fallen. One of the auditors has estimated that 60 % of the loans –that is to say Fr 112' 000- are irremediably lost. We have also discovered several irregularities, due to the lack of experience of the employees and, to a great extent, to the economic instability of the country. There are

for example accounting errors, the debtor interest rates have sometimes been doubled, and some loan files are missing.

Some rejoicing news: Mr Jean-Claude Ruffieux, a Swiss volunteer who spent 4 months with the local staff, has completed a thorough stocktaking of the loans, saving accounts, social shares and personal data. He has put all this information in our computer and offered several days of training to the staff. On the other hand, the problems described above are so serious, and the social environment so unhealthy, that Haïti-Cosmos decided to stop its backing of CMH. Jean Claude resigned from the post of vice-president, leaving the control of the cooperative to Brother Armand who is on the spot.

2. Bâti-Brique (clay building cooperative)

Much to our satisfaction, the young people from Bâti-Brique, forty of which received brick laying training through Haiti-Cosmos, are gradually breaking away from their political affiliation. According to the latest news, many of them have found a job. Some of them are independent workers, some are employed by NGOs based at Hinche, and the rest have been enrolled in the MPP (Mouvement Paysan Papaye) directed by Jean-Baptiste Chavannes, a man who has been championed the plight of the peasants for thirty years.

To put a definite end to this program, we decided to offer the equipment, worth Fr 20' 000, to the MPP, which will make good use of it in aid of the peasants. The clay construction technique is all the more justified since between August 2002 and August 2003 the price of a 30-kilo bag of cement has increased from \$4 to \$9.

3. Health Programme

When Jean-Claude and Amalia-Elena arrived in Port-au-Prince, the doctor responsible for the health centres told them that the medical assistants had not been paid for four months because they had not yet produced full reports. He also criticized the Haiti-Cosmos committee for having sent an evaluator to Haiti without telling him about it in advance.

Mr Ruffieux had already informed us of the Regional Director for Public Health's complaints about our not keeping touch with his ministry. Before officially authorizing the functioning of the health centres, the ministry demands that they be extended by two new rooms: a maternity ward, and a room where the assistant could sleep when unable to return home in the rainy season. He also made it known that he disapproves of the term "health centres" and asks us to replace it with "dispensaries", already used in Hinche.

Jean-Claude and Amalia-Elena visited all the dispensaries, except that of Bentourib which was not yet completed. They also met all the medical assistants and had discussions with some patients in the villages. Of the 13 dispensaries built in 2001, two were closed for a few months because of the absence of two assistants: one of them had found a higher-paid job, and the other had fallen sick. Amalia-Elena studied the medical reports that eleven assistants had given to the responsible doctor, and she found them fully satisfactory. She was even very pleased with their work. These assistants therefore subsequently received their salaries.

For 2003, Amalia-Elena organized from Geneva two training sessions: Tropical medicine (52 hours) and Pharmacology (18 hours). A 40-hour seminar was also given by two experienced assistants. Forty people profited from this teaching, which was followed by an examination organized for the recruitment of new assistants. We are very happy to have found fifteen new qualified assistants for the health programme. Thus, seven new dispensaries were inaugurated by Jean-Claude and Amalia-Elena during their stay. The twenty-one assistants who are currently on duty are supervised and managed by a chief nurse, Marie-Sonise Louis, who was responsible for the dispensary of Hinche, and who brilliantly passed her examination for this appointment.

All in all, one can say that the most urgent problems have been solved. Amalia-Elena gave a report on each dispensary, discussed with every assistant and answered their questions. She also gave more than 150 consultations in the various dispensaries, where she used batches of drugs received from various Swiss manufacturers. These were for cases for which a diagnosis was difficult for the assistants. She confirms that the assistants work correctly, and strive to resolve major problems whilst filling the gaps in their knowledge.

4. Garden of Medicinal Plants

The Central Plateau population is still interested in our project of medicinal plants. The price of drugs has increased so much that it has become prohibitive for the majority of patients. The assistants thus continue to propose plants instead of the drugs sold in drugstores. Three of them even made up plant syrups to treat some of their patients' diseases.

Except in Hinche, where the garden has 121 species of medicinal plants, we still have difficulties to create a garden of medicinal plants at each dispensary. This could not be completed without some form of irrigation. We already sent money in April to drill some wells. Part of this money is still in a bank account since the person in charge of the work increased his price after having drilled four wells and installed just one pump, that of Hinche.

Some urgent actions have been taken for the drilling of wells that will irrigate the gardens and also provide drinking water to the surrounding population. We also have transferred some funds to build fences around each garden.

5. Technical College IGEC/Polytec

Since October 2001, Polytec has offered a two-year training program in agriculture, veterinary techniques, management, accountancy and construction techniques. The young people from the Central Plateau showed real enthusiasm in these courses, which met perfectly the local needs. We started with 150 pupils.

However in August 2003, we found that the school had to cope with two major problems. First, the teachers who were to lecture in veterinary and building techniques tendered their resignations, considering that the proposed salary was too low. These two sections could therefore not start as planned. Then the teachers in agricultural techniques, who had first agreed to take their students in farms for practical work, changed their minds: They considered themselves to be underpaid for such additional work.

Generally speaking, the students, who are only 88 as against 150 two years ago, are complaining about their teachers' unreliability and the decreasing quality of the teaching.

B. REORGANIZATION

The above summary certainly pinpoints several shortcomings. It is difficult for the committee of Haiti-Cosmos to accept such a rapid deterioration in the management of these programmes, for which so much effort has been made in the last seven years. Foremost in our minds are our donors' feelings: their disappointment must be proportional to their generosity and goodwill towards Haiti. Their solidarity gives us the strength to go on and squarely face the problems. What is to be done? We have come to the following conclusion: We had decided to focus our action on the poorest area of the country, the Central Plateau of Haiti where poverty often means lack of resources; now, the problems encountered there are precisely due to the lack of experience, training and motivation of the administrative staff who live in a highly precarious socio-economic situation. This having been said, we feel we should still try and save at least the projects, which are particularly useful to this region. **But this requires a total reorganization:**

1. The Cosmos Foundation

We have now created a foundation in Hinche, the Cosmos Foundation. The equipment, the buildings and the land belonging to Haiti-Cosmos in the Central Plateau have been handed over to the new Foundation as inheritance. Directed by a five-member Foundation Board, this foundation has taken over the management of the projects we decided to support, namely: Polytec, the health program, a farming college (EMAS), and the gardens of medicinal plants. Mr Jean-Baptiste Chavannes, member of the Foundation Board, has been appointed Executive Manager of the Foundation Cosmos. He will supervise the chief nurse, an agronomist and a manager.

2. Health Programme

This programme is crucial for the Central Plateau, a region with only ten doctors for nearly one million people. It will be managed by the chief nurse until we find a suitable doctor. This nurse, who received an excellent training, will continue to supervise the medical assistants and coordinate their work. She will keep in touch with the Ministry for Public Health. She will also make sure that the assistants get integrated in the community life of the villages, and that they have the basic equipment to carry out their work (instruments for measuring blood pressure, chairs, dressers, benches, beds, etc).

3. Polytec

The future of Haiti is in the training of its young people. They represent about 60 % of the population. One million Haitian children cannot go to school. Polytec is the only technical school on the Central Plateau, and there is no other school in the whole country where the annual fee is only Fr.112. This establishment has already trained some fifteen managers and fourteen accountants who have all found a job. Closing this school, which meets a vital need for the community, would be to deprive the country of technicians needed for its development.

Therefore we are closing only the construction department, because we have difficulties in finding teachers who are engineers; however the management and the accountancy departments will continue to function, but under the responsibility of the manager.

4. SAMC – The Seramond Agricultural Middle College (project)

Under the responsibility of the agronomist, the SAMC is an agricultural and stock farming college we plan to create, in order to remove from Polytec the agricultural and veterinary techniques training program, and to improve upon it. This college will be located in the suburbs of Hinche, where we can get a large piece of building land (about 250 acres). Part of this land could be used to build an experimental farm, where each student could work on his own parcel. The courses will be given by agronomists.

The SAMC is scheduled to open on October 1, 2004, if the necessary funds can be found quickly enough. It is becoming urgent to create it for the following reasons: the Polytec building is too small to receive the young people who wish to follow agricultural and stock farming training. The current size of this class is 25. It could have been larger if we had had more space. We also realized that it is impossible to train agricultural technicians without having an experimental farm, practice being essential in this field.

Such a college represents a major asset for the Central Plateau, because it prepares young technicians who will take part in the development process of their country. In 2002, about two-thirds of the agricultural needs of Haitian cities were imported from abroad! The national production is no longer sufficient to feed the population: the country lacks technology, its lands are poor, and its peasants are left to fend for themselves.

A small anecdote: a big American NGO uses our dispensaries to distribute food to the pregnant women of the Central Plateau who come to see our medical staff. We met them last August. Once a week, each

woman gets a rice pot, a wheat bran pot and 5 decilitres of oil. This food supply comes directly from the United States.

To achieve our goal, we must set up the basic infrastructure: classrooms, library, dormitory, refectory and kitchen. The head and the teachers of the college hope to reach self-sufficiency in the financing of operating costs in about two to three years. To reach this goal, they will need agricultural equipment to farm part of the land, so that they can feed the trainees and sell food products.

5. Garden of medicinal plants

Our experience of the medicinal garden in Hinche has forced us to reconsider the purpose of the gardens to be built around the dispensaries: They should be dedicated merely to training and practical courses as these gardens will never produce enough plants to treat the population of the Central Plateau; furthermore there is the hazard that patients, who may try to find by themselves the plants prescribed by the medical assistants, pick the wrong ones.

We have therefore decided to set up a production centre of medicinal plants on part of the SAMC land. This centre, and the other gardens as well, will be placed under the control of the agronomist, and will have to supply the dispensaries in medicinal plants.

C. THANKS

We thank Liliane and Jean-Claude Ruffieux who voluntarily went to work with our team in the Central Plateau. Mr Ruffieux has made a report on all the projects, which will help us to improve the management of those we decide to carry on.

We thank all the donors and, in particular, the Parthenon Foundation, which made us an exceptional gift, through the Swiss Association of Friends of Sister Emmanuelle. This gift enabled us to build several new dispensaries, and the rest is currently used for the drilling of 17 wells. We also thank the State of Geneva, the municipalities of Chêne-Bougeries, Chêne-Bourg, Versoix and Thônex for their support in 2002.

We thank finally all our friends, without whom our presence in Haiti would have been useless, in particular the Swiss Association of Friends of Sister Emmanuelle, and particularly its president, our untiring ambassador, Mr Michel Bittar.

JACQUES NERFIN

Important memo to the friends of ASASE: IF YOU WISH TO RECEIVE NEXT YEAR A CERTIFICATE FOR THE GIFTS MADE IN 2003, IN ORDER TO GET TAX REDUCTION, PLEASE WRITE TO US OR CALL US ON THURSDAYS DECEMBER 4th, AND 11th 2003 IN THE AFTERNOON. A voluntary secretary will answer your calls and will register you on a list, which will be also useful in the coming years, God willing.

THANK YOU AND A HAPPY CHRISTMAS TO ALL OUR FRIENDS AND BENEFACTORS

MICHEL BITTAR
President