



Association suisse des Amis
de Soeur Emmanuelle

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LETTER TO THE FRIENDS OF SISTER EMMANUELLE

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Dear friends,

Please find below the statement I plan to make during the festivities we are organizing in Geneva to celebrate the 25th anniversary of our Association.

ALSO ENCLOSED ARE TWO SMALL FLYERS GIVING THE PROGRAM OF THESE EVENTS. YOU ARE WARMLY INVITED TO COME AND REJOICE WITH US IN CELEBRATING THIS ANNIVERSARY.

As you will note, a bank in Geneva has agreed to sponsor the show of May 18th, which will take place in Sister Emmanuelle's presence.

Dear friends of Sister Emmanuelle and supporters of our Association,

Let me first tell you that, as the President of our Association, I address this meeting with a sense of deep gratitude towards Sister Emmanuelle and all those who have lent me their support by working within the Association during these last 25 years.

Our meeting with Sister Emmanuelle dates back to 1979. At that time, little did I imagine what we were letting ourselves in for. Sister Emmanuelle had a very precise goal: to set up an Association which would help her raise funds to assist her garbage-collecting and rag-picking brothers from Cairo. Our small group got completely involved in this adventure.

Thus our very new Association held its first Annual General Meeting in 1979 and formed its first Committee with some friends and personalities who agreed to come together to offer their spare time and know-how. We started looking for funds with Sister Emmanuelle, organizing conferences in the cantons of Geneva, Vaud, Valais, Jura and in the German-speaking part of Switzerland. We soon got into the habit of sending to our donors a quarterly newsletter, to keep them regularly informed of our actions.

The money we collected enabled us to finance Sister Emmanuelle's specific projects (schools, dispensaries, maternities) in the public refuse sites of Matarieh, Ezbet-El-Nakhl, and the Mokattam.

Then a significant change occurred in 1986. Having spent my early years in the Sudanese capital, Khartoum, I was greatly saddened by the tragic consequences of the civil war which had resumed: Ragged children were hanging around in the streets, begging or stealing. They had fled from the war

and famine ravaging the South, had walked hundreds of miles to seek shelter, and found themselves forsaken in Khartoum, with no one to turn to... A hopeless situation... A cousin of mine and his wife, Gilbert and Simone Brahamsha, had opened a home in Khartoum to offer a shelter to these children they literally picked up in the streets. I used to help them as much as I could financially, but soon the needs exceeded our limited means. However we could not just leave these kids to themselves again, and there were so many more in the streets! I sent a plane ticket to Sister Emmanuelle, who, although somewhat reluctant to come to Khartoum, realised after a few days that Sudan indeed needed her help !!

She enthusiastically launched out into this new adventure, and succeeded in imparting her faith and optimism to all of us. Since 1986, the Swiss Association has focused its action on helping the displaced southerners, who hang around in the suburbs of the overpopulated capital, and who somehow survive in an utterly destitute environment ; everyone of us needs to see this at least once to realize how privileged, we Europeans, are !

We managed to set up a very efficient structure in Khartoum, directed by the deacon Kamal Tadros, and we decided to operate exclusively through a local NGO - the Saint Vincent de Paul Society - of which Kamal was the acting Secretary; this saved us a lot of problems and hindrances which the foreign NGOs often suffered from. Very quickly, our initiative turned out amazingly well. Here are some figures to let you judge for yourselves. These figures come from a fact-finding report requested by the French Association and produced by Mrs Laure Baudin, who stayed in Khartoum from the 15th to the 22nd of February, visiting almost all of our current programs there. I shall now read you, from pages 22 and 23 of her report, a summary of the programs undertaken and their beneficiaries. (I read the enclosed table)...

And the miracle has been going on for all these years... But how come a small Association, with only about one thousand members as regular donors, can perpetuate programs representing hundreds of thousands of francs per year, meet its commitments, and take up the many challenges that Kamal, our man on the spot, comes up with?

In my opinion, this kind of permanent miracle can be explained as follows:

- First it is due to Sister Emmanuelle's appeal and to the staunch faithfulness of our members, who supported us financially during all these years.
- It is also due to our devoted committee, which has never given up when facing difficulties.
- Our sister Associations have been a major support as well; particularly ASMAE and OPERATION ORANGE in France and CARITAS HILFWERK IN GRAZ Austria. These organisations continue to play a significant role in the contribution of funds, even though they have to finance their own projects in other countries too.
- Certain Swiss foundations have also fully helped us launch some specific projects ; and they continue to grant us their full support after having been on the spot and checked out what was being achieved in the field. They particularly appreciate how efficiently we use the resources they provide.
- For one should recall the fact that, during all these years, the overheads incurred by our Association have been completely covered by a family who lived for many years in Sudan thus enabling us to keep our operating expenses at about 3 to 5% of our annual budget.
- And certainly one of the most important factors is the commitment and ingeniousness of our director on site, the deacon Kamal Tadros, who, in 1986, had chosen to quit his flourishing business to become the head of our organization in Khartoum. He is not among us today because he is doing his annual tour in German-speaking Switzerland, since it had been planned a year ago. But he is certainly with us in spirit...

Before ending this presentation, I must finally add that our action has extended to Haiti for about six years now. The results there have been really amazing, although occasionally disappointing due to lack of continuity, especially since Jean-Claude François left Haiti. Jean-Claude is the manager of "Haiti-Cosmos", a small NGO which we have helped as much we could. The political changes that recently occurred in this country give us hope we shall soon be able to resume our action on the plateau of Hinche.

Annual General Meeting

We invite all the members of the Friends of Sister Emmanuelle Association to attend its annual general meeting which will take place on

Tuesday, the 25th of May 2004, at 8 p.m.

**at the Saint Boniface room
14, avenue du Mail, Geneva**

For those people interested, please note that a MASS will be celebrated on Wednesday 19th May at 18.30 by MGR Genoud at the Notre Dame basilica, in the presence of Sister Emmanuelle, to thank the Lord for our 25th anniversary.

We look forward to the possibility of meeting many of you at these various events.

MICHEL BITTAR
President