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LETTER TO THE FRIENDS OF SISTER EMMANUELLE

N° 97

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Dear Friends,

In this letter, you will find two reports, both forwarded unchanged, with a lot of interesting details. Our two vice presidents wanted to see what SVDP is carrying out with our financial support on the spot, in Khartoum. They organized their trip at their own expense.

NEWS FROM SUDAN

In our next letter planned for the beginning of May, we shall give you a report on our ongoing programs and our projects. But we can already let you know that our budget 2006, the highest ever, has been fully met, thanks mainly to you, to your generosity, trust and faithfulness!

In the meantime, here is the travel report of our two vice-presidents back from Khartoum:

A delegation of 8 people went to Khartoum from the 3rd to the 10th of December 2006. There were 4 members of a Sister Emmanuelle's French Association called "Operation Orange" (Patrick and Madeleine Cuinet, Madeleine Fourmaud and Monique d'Hérouville), and 4 members of the Swiss Association of the Friends of Sister Emmanuelle (Fabienne Lebedinsky, her son Thomas, Luc and Marie-Claire Ricou).

After a friendly meeting at the Cairo airport, we flew to Sudan. When we landed at 6 a.m., our friend Kamal was waiting for us. Kamal Tadros is the Secretary of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society and our representative in Sudan. He drove us to our hotel, which was guarded day and night by police officers.



Kamal Tadros

After a morning's rest, we discovered Khartoum: 6 millions people living in a widespread city surrounded by the desert. A new world greeted our eyes: dusty roads crowded with pedestrians, and cars skilfully driving in spite of the lack of signs. The houses looked unfinished. Only the sun illuminated the city.

Meals for thousands of children

The purpose of our travel was to visit the programs supported by our generous donors and operated by the Saint Vincent de Paul Society.

We were prepared a fairly tight schedule.

Our first visit was Kamal's office, where we were pleased to meet his main colleagues, who appeared to be responsible and motivated men. On a wall, an organization chart indicated their various functions.

The numerous centres scattered in the desert around the capital are perfectly managed. We were driven to them by a small bus moving along trails. What a shock to see in the desert, thousands of huts built out of bricks or rags, sheltering refugees and displaced people who flee the warring regions of their country!



We were moved to discover our centres amidst this desolation. Five days per week, children from 1 to 8 can get a meal there. It is so touching to see some of these kids, who carry on their hip their younger brother or sister, sitting down in circle on a rug, and eating with their fingers! They look happy together in these oases of hope.

The drinking water supply is another difficulty. Two means were set up to convey the precious liquid. The oldest one: wells have been drilled, making it possible to the inhabitants to receive the water delivered in the huts by donkey-driven carts carrying filled cans.

The modern one: tankers are supplying this vital liquid to the population 7 days a week. It is impossible for us to imagine a life without water.



Clinics for the displaced people

Health issues have not been forgotten. Two dispensaries open every Friday. Doctors come from Khartoum for the consultation. The patients are waiting their turn with much dignity. They sit outside in a well-arranged place, protected from the sun by a roof in straw. There is always there a laboratory assistant who can do the tests necessary to diagnose the diseases and immediately give some medicine. The day of our visit, Kamal gave them a few hygiene recommendations, knowing that these people live in very precarious places.

There are also mobile clinics for these displaced people who have been very affected by what they have undergone. The care we give has a vital importance to them.

Meeting with a Minister

We had the pleasure to meet the Minister for the social affairs of Khartoum. As she had been nominated just two months ago, she did not know the programs set up by the Saint Vincent de Paul Society. Kamal presented them to her, and made her aware of the support of the donors and of our presence in Sudan. The point was to ask for the collaboration of the authorities of her country. The minister wishes to get support from foreign countries and to improve the communication, in order to change the perception of her country abroad. She has then promised to do her best to reduce the administrative restraints.

We have been warmly welcomed at the residence of the Swiss representative. She explained the changes in the Swiss policy regarding Sudan: it started in 2005, when the peace agreement between the North and the South was signed. Switzerland has then wished to take part in the development of the country. She encouraged us to carry on the vocational training in Khartoum and in the south of the country, so that the young people have a job and avoid getting recruited by the militia.

A good vocational training

Located in the farms and the refugee camps, the vocational training workshops are essential to transmit to the young people and to the adults a know-how which will enable them to find a work in one of the following trade: masonry, electricity, carpentry, sewing, leatherwork, computer, refrigeration and agricultural techniques. When they have successfully completed their training, they receive a certificate. We had the privilege to be invited to the awarding ceremony that took place in the Jebel Awlia farm, at forty kilometres from Khartoum. It was a touching ceremony, attended by more than a thousand people,

and including various songs, dances, and speeches. The members of our delegation were entrusted with the presentation of the certificates to the graduates. How joyful they were to receive this precious document that will enable them to get a job and earn a living!

We have come quite a good way since 1986, when four people decided to help the children in Khartoum who had fled the war raging in the South. These young orphans used to hang about the streets of Khartoum. We pay homage to Sister Emmanuelle, to Simone Brahamsha -a French woman who used to live in the Sudanese capital-, to Kamal Tadros and to our president Michel Bittar. This invaluable collaboration gave rise to various expanding programs that give assistance to people who have lost everything.

The work achieved by Kamal and his team is outstanding. They devote their energy to saving lives by giving the hope of a better future.

We cannot leave them! With our firm belief and your essential support, we must continue our action and say like Sister Emmanuelle: **YALLAH, FORWARD HO!**

Fabienne, Thomas Lebedinsky, Luc and Marie-Claire Ricou

NEWS FROM HAITI

And now, here is Jean Claude François' report:

During my stay in the Central Plateau in November and December 2006, I supervised the work of about a hundred people: the administrative staff, the teachers, the medical assistants, the technicians of the centre of medicinal plants, and the guards of the dispensaries. Here is some news of each program.

Technical college, Polytech

The 2006 summer session ended up in September with 8 new graduates; that brings up to 66 the total number of young people trained so far in our school in accounting, management or agriculture. The winter session started in October with 130 students. We have started a new course in Construction techniques. This course answers a need often expressed by the youth of Hinche. Its contents are based on our past experience with the young people of the Bati-Brique Association: we train the young people how to use properly the local resources, such as clay bricks, bamboo, fibrocement tiles etc... The 16 trainees registered in this section are coached by 5 engineers who are teachers of the school.

Périclès Beaugé was transferred at La Gonave in December 2006, to meet the needs of his principal activity, which is directing the ONG Vision sur le monde. The Reverend Joel Alexandre has replaced him as head of the college. This man, a Pastor of the 1st Protestant Church in Hinche, is a graduate of the Ecole Normale Supérieure, and has a strong education in civil engineering, law and mathematics.

The staff consists of about fifteen teachers working part-time, including two former trainees of the college. We have now a student counsellor, Mr Giordanie Jean (a former student of ours), who can orientate the young people and coordinate the work of the teachers.

Dispensaries

Two out of the four constructions that started this year are completed. Thus, in December 2006, we have inaugurated two new dispensaries that concern a population of nearly 25 000 inhabitants. During these opening ceremonies, people have organized a nice party to express their joy and have a meal together.

We have 23 dispensaries currently operating in the Central Plateau. Every quarter, the 23 medical assistants receive a one-day training on a medical topic. This training is given by a graduated doctor. This year, they also had two special trainings, on AIDS and on tuberculosis, which are endemic diseases in this region. These trainings were offered by the ONG Zanmi La Santé.

This ONG collaborates with us by regularly using our dispensaries and our assistants to distribute drugs and to inform the population about AIDS and tuberculosis. We also collaborate with the ONG Vision sur le Monde, that is distributing drugs and food to pregnant women in our dispensaries.

We carefully observed the work of the assistants, and it convinced us that these small health structures in the plains and mountains of the Central Plateau are meeting a real need indeed. However, there is still a lot to do: several buildings are damaged and have to be repaired; the fences must be overhauled; we should drill some wells and repair other ones; in addition, we absolutely need a doctor to supervise the work of the assistants.

Laboratory of medicinal plants

In December 2005, we started to build our laboratory of medicinal plants. Our aim is to provide the dispensaries with five drugs, in syrup form, tincture and sachets of powder. These medicines will be made up out of local plants that are known to have a curative effect on malaria, mycosis, influenza, gastritis and fever.

Construction is behind schedule because of the insecurity which prevails in the country: goods trains are attacked and robbed by gangsters; the prices of material can increase twofold in a few days, and their deliveries are late; sometimes the labourer are afraid to come on the building site. But things have calmed down a little for a few weeks, and the engineer in charge of the project promised us to have the building completed between March and June 2007.

The farming staff keeps on producing seedlings in tree nursery before transplanting them in our land. A safety guard squad has been hired to watch over the land and the building site. Several persons, who are former trainees in medicinal plants, wish to work now as technicians in our laboratory. We would like to organize an additional training for these people, so that we could hire some skilled people among them. This training could be given by some specialists from the University of Geneva and the Cantonal Hospital, under the recommendation of the Grangettes Foundation, represented by Mrs Caroline Ferrero-Menut.

The local population will benefit a lot from this project, as they shall soon be treated by our medical assistants with natural, local -and therefore cheaper- medicines.

Rural school in Séramond

We have built and managed for two years a small school at Séramond, near the laboratory of medicinal plants. In this school, which also serves as a church in the village, are coming 160 pupils from 5 to 15, some of them living two hours away. They receive a hot lunch. They are taken in hand by 5 teachers and a director.

In order to encourage parents to be more responsible, we have helped them to form an association. They meet at least once a year to discuss about how the school is going on. On that occasion, a committee of 5 members appointed for two years gives a report on its management to the assembly. We request the parents to pay 0,30 CHF per pupil and per month. Although a token contribution, it is often not paid on time by some destitute parents.

Thanks

We thank Mr André Renard, who has been our local collaborator for 10 years, but who has to leave us now that he has been elected Mayor of Hinche. His election is perceived as a sign of recognition of the work we achieved in the region.

We also thank the city councils of Geneva, in particular the City of Geneva, the city councils of Chêne-Bourg, Chêne-Bougeries and Versoix, for their consistent support to our program in Haiti.

Let us also thank our friends Françoise and Louis Aebi, Dr. Pascal Bonnabry, Professor Kurt Hostettmann, the members of the committee of the Grangettes Foundation and of the Coromandel Foundation, and all the other donors who help us steadily.

Finally we thank the Swiss Association of the Friends of Sister Emmanuelle, in particular its president, Mr Michel Bittar, who has become a great friend of Haiti.

Jean-Claude François
Vice-President of Haiti Cosmos

NEWS FROM SWITZERLAND

Let us celebrate together the 20 years anniversary of our action in Sudan!

We are pleased to announce to you that, **to celebrate the 20 years anniversary of our action in Sudan, we are organizing two events in Geneva on Thursday May 31 and Friday June 1, and that you are all warmly invited to these evening performances.**

Here is the program:

- on Thursday May 31: a one-hour projection of the **film** “*Children of the Nile*” by Patrick Bittar, followed by a **debate** with Kamal Tadros among other participants: “*20 years of Sister Emmanuelle’s action in Sudan – Is it worth giving?*”
- on Friday June 1: an evening performance of the play produced in Paris, adapted from the book of Sister Emmanuelle “*Vivre, à quoi ça sert?*”, staged by Magalie Tiles.

We are making a partnership with the FNAC for this last event, which will hopefully be the starting point of a small tour in French-speaking Switzerland.

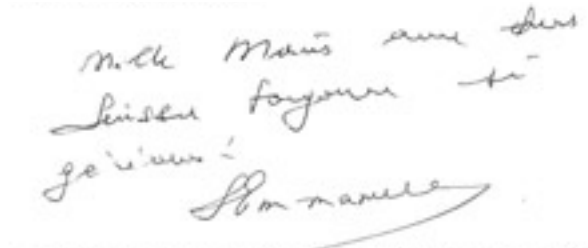
We are also preparing a surprise for the children, planned on Wednesday May 30, in the daytime.

We shall give you of course further information and all the necessary details in our next letter, which is planned for the beginning of May, but you can already book these two evenings! Do not hesitate to come accompanied: it is an opportunity to see the fruits of your generosity on a wide screen, and to discover the staging of the invigorating words of our guide, Sister Emmanuelle.

News from Sister Emmanuelle

By the way, we have rather good news from of our dear **Sister Emmanuelle**: she is of course very tired, but it is quite natural when you are 98! And she has kept her sharp mind, overflowing with concern for everybody, and praying for all those who, closely or from afar, known or anonymous, make it possible for our association to act for the most destitute.

Here is a small handwritten note to your attention:



Alternative micro-project

As you know, each year, our association chooses to support punctually and modestly another project, apart from our Sudanese and Haitian projects.

This year, a project has been presented to us by Rodolphe Hammadi, a friend of my son Patrick's. Rodolphe is a photographer who has, for several years, focused his work on the daily life of poor families of the North-East and the Mid-West of Brazil (fishermen, landless farmers, street hawkers...). The project presented to ASASE was born last year when he was making an illustrated report on the daily life of women who, in the state of Tocantins, are exploiting the nuts of a palm tree (the *babaçu*), mainly used in cosmetics. For about thirty years, these women have been working to nourish their families, whereas their husbands were fighting to defend their land from some alleged owners who want to despoil them.

These women live with their families far from the cities, without running water or electricity. They have no access to education or to any medical care, and they have no status recognized by the Federal State. They work 10 to 12 hours a day for 2€ (the price of 1kg of sugar or rice). At lunch, in the wood, they eat some peppers and a little flour of manioc. Some days, they have just nothing to eat.



Photo : R.Hammadi

The nut-breakers from the Piquizeiro village let him know that they wished to build a bakery, to provide bread to their community, and to sell some at the nearest city, 15 km away.

The total estimated budget for the construction and the equipment of this bakery is 6 000 €.

Marcelo Silva, a Brazilian journalist with whom Rodolphe already worked on this matter, shall make a documentary on the starting up of the project: buying the material, providing a van for transportation, setting up the bakery, getting the first breads out of the oven. All this should take less than one month and be carried out in 2007.

After having thought it over, together with our two vice-presidents, **we have decided to support this project up to the presented budget.**

Rodolphe has recently created in Marseille, where he is living, an association called I-PULSAR, which will supervise the operation and be responsible for its realization. He will come back with an illustrated report on the installation of this bakery.

Various promotional operations are already envisaged (some exhibitions in France and in the United States, some publications on Internet); of course they will all mention the support of ASASE. We shall let you know about the progress of the project and about these various events.

The « Moneybox of the Sudanese Child » operation

Finally, you will find enclosed to this 97th letter two **postal checks**: one, as usual, is intended to finance all our programs in 2007; the other one is specifically **for the donations that you already could collect with the “Moneyboxes of the Sudanese Child”** sent in Christmas. These donations will be allocated to our babies feeding program¹. It will be our spring harvest, before that of Christmas 2007. Feel free to participate to one of them... or to both!

In addition, **we invite you to send us an email at info@asase.org regarding this operation**: we are interested in all your impressions, stories and remarks, in your encouragements and your criticisms as well. We shall publish some of your emails in our next letters.

Let us, members of the Committee and myself, thank you for your support, and while waiting for Kamal and our next letter in May, we wish you all in advance a beautiful Easter, full of faith, hope and charity.

Michel Bittar
President

¹ 2 CHF = 10 daily meals for a child living in the camps for displaced people.