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## LETTER TO FRIENDS OF SISTER EMMANUELLE

N°158

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*« It is by attaching our plow to a star that it will fly away and tear us away from nothingness. This star is that of love, this path is that of the heart. »*

Dear Friends,

**During my visit to South Sudan in October**, I could measure the impact of the assistance provided to the population, thanks to your support, by our local partner, the Saint-Vincent-de-Paul Society, Juba (SVDP).

For example, **this year is marked by an exceptional number of trainees** in the 9 vocational training courses offered: 548 compared to 410 in 2023! Actually, **to meet the demand of the inhabitants of the Lologo slum**, where the training center is located, **SVDP has integrated 72 young ex-gang members**.

For several years, these gangs, which included around 5000 young people, had been the major cause of insecurity in the capital, particularly in the poor neighborhood of Lologo. Last year, community leaders organized awareness programs (especially in Lologo) and a large conciliation meeting in Juba, with the support of the Ministry of Interior, UN agencies and NGOs, such as SVDP: in the presence of the Deputy Governor of Central Equatoria State, gang leaders signed a commitment to cease their activities and end their internal wars.

The members of SVDP then courageously took up the challenge of welcoming 72 young people - many of whom had been in prison - **to enable their social reintegration**: 30 in Electricity, 25 in Automobile Repair, 14 in Construction, 2 in Welding and 1 in Refrigeration.

**I was surprised to learn that the presence of these young people in the classes did not cause any problems.** Only two (enrolled in Welding) dropped out.

I met three of them and I had a hard time imagining that they could have had a criminal past: they had all clearly broken with their gangs, their addictions and violence (two of them had been to prison), and showed real determination in their new path.

Here is the testimony of David Gore, 19, trainee in Automobile Repair: *"I was born in Khartoum, the third boy in a family of seven children, including six boys. In 2012, after the creation of South Sudan, we left our father in Sudan and emigrated to Lologo I. Life was difficult, we had no money: my mother sells vegetables in the markets. But I manage to complete my primary school education."*



David Gore, 2024 trainee in Automobile Repair

*In August 2021, when I was in my first year of high school, I dropped out of school. I started hanging out with friends, drinking, smoking. I joined a gang, the Wrong Boys, to survive and protect each other. There were about thirty of us... One of my older brothers joined the gang: before that, he worked (moto-taxi) but his motorcycle had just been stolen. We used to smoke weed, take pills (Cosmos, codeine, painkillers), ice [methamphetamine]... We started stealing from people, raping girls... I regret all of this so much... I lost so many friends... guys I spent all my time with. Sometimes they slept at my place, sometimes I slept at theirs.*

*A year later, in July, on Independence Day, we had no money to party. My best friend, Wani, said, "I'm going to get some money (rob people)." I went to shower and get ready for the party. Meanwhile, Wani was attacked by a rival gang, the BSB (Black Street Boys), from Lologo II: they beat him with machetes, cut his stomach open with a knife and left him on the ground with his entrails exposed. A few hours later, the police came to our neighborhood, searched Wani's house and asked his mother to follow them, without explanation. "What did my child do?" she asked in tears. In fact, Wani had died in hospital. He was 17. It hurt us so much: we ate together, did everything together! With the gang, we decided to avenge our brother. We went to the BSB area, but there were soldiers everywhere and no gang members. The following days we searched for them, riding motorbikes, in vain: they were hiding. Two months later, Wani's murderer was arrested by the police.*

*That shocked me. I suffered too much... I didn't want to end up like my brother Wani or other friends who are in prison. In May 2023, the government organized peace between the gangs. My gang dissolved, we now live in peace with the others. I don't do drugs anymore. My brother also left the gang and has now finished his schooling.*

*I had heard the Sultan [the neighborhood leader] talk about the Saint-Vincent-de-Paul Center... And in the street, I used to see trainees passing by or those who were working here or there after graduating. I applied, and now I am able to repair a car! I will be able to earn a living and help my family. I beg SVDP to give me a toolbox when I graduate, so that I can start my own business. May God help me!"*

The local population is extremely grateful to SVDP for this action which corresponds to the motto of the training program - "Take the guns out of the hands and replace them by tools" - in the spirit of the quote from Sister Emmanuelle at the beginning of this letter: by attaching our plow to the star of love.

Meanwhile, **the South Sudanese pound** continues to fall more than ever: **since the beginning of the year, its value against the dollar has been divided by 5!** The price of a liter of gasoline is about \$1. This impacts the cost of everything, even water from the Nile tributary which is delivered to the population by tanker trucks.

In addition to its standard trainings, **SVDP continues to build local ties with NGOs** to provide shorter training courses: during my stay, 6 Sudanese from the Nuba Mountains, who work for NGOs or the Sudanese government, were completing a welding training funded by the National Christian Development Organization. Thomas Wani, a recent and promising recruit to the management team, is in charge of local networking.

Finally, we would like to inform you of the death of Marie-Claire Ricou in June. A long-standing member of ASASE, where she served as Vice-President for many years, and a pillar of our Committee, Marie-Claire had invested herself alongside us with her characteristic modesty, generosity and kindness. We will miss her greatly...

We thank you for your very important donation!  
Our president Florence Rivollet and our treasurer ([teminian@cofigen.ch](mailto:teminian@cofigen.ch)) remain at your disposal for your possible legacy projects.  
We wish you a very Merry Christmas!

Thomas Wani, 37, member of SVDP senior staff



  
**Patrick Bittar**  
Director