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LETTER TO FRIENDS OF SISTER EMMANUELLE

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*"I pray for peace in my country: let the love of power give in to the power of Love."
(Gordon Betram Kuol, Programs Coordinator in South Sudan)*

Dear friends,

For a few days in July, Juba, the capital of South Sudan where our local partner - the Saint Vincent de Paul Society (SVDP) Juba - is operating, has been the theatre of heavy fighting between President Kiir's troops and those of his opponent, Machar. Helicopters, tanks, mortars, grenade launchers and heavy weapons killed more than 300 people, including many civilians. Machar has fled abroad. Following these fights, 36 000 residents of the capital have left their homes and 185,000 people emigrated. Since the first semester, inflation is 650%. The central bank has no more reserves. The poorest cannot afford a whole tomato in the markets, and they are forced to buy only half!

Betram, SVDP Juba projects coordinator, had to leave his home because the area, in the suburbs, became too dangerous. After having locked himself in for 48h (sleeping under his bed), he walked in streets littered with corpses and deserted from civilians, down to the cathedral, where he was sent a vehicle. He is currently accommodated in a guest room of the university. He could not even go back home yet to retrieve his belongings, because it is too risky, especially at night.

The Lologo Vocational Training Centre and Community Development has been closed ten days after the fighting in July. Since then, all programs have resumed normally.

Betram's annual visit to Switzerland, France and Austria in September has been very successful. During our presentation to 150 pupils of the Florimont Institute in Geneva, **he mentioned his amazing background. We've chosen to tell you a few episodes of it.**

Betram Gordon Kuol was born in a remote village near Bor, a town 150 km north of Juba. In his Dinka community, the power used to be determined by the number of owned heads of cattle. *"Cattle breeding was a way to survive but also to keep the family structure: to get married, men had to offer cattle to the bride's family."* Betram is the fifth in a family of eight siblings. His father, who has



In Geneva in September (from left to right): Ian Mawsdley (SVP England and Wales), Betram G. Kuol (SVDP Juba), Patrick Bittar (ASASE), Deacon Robert Ferrua (Caritas Monaco) and Michel Bittar (ASASE)

6 wives, is the sole man of the family living in the city. He is a medical assistant. Betram therefore lives with his grandmother who has him keep goats. *"Only the poor were sending their children to school. Among the Dinka, it was looked down upon."* But on a providential day, when Betram is 7, he gets ill and is sent to the city. Once there, he starts school. All the people from his village who come in town are accommodated in his father's house. In its two rooms, sometimes they are so numerous that they can form two football teams!

The secondary school is a boarding fee-paying school. *"A small piece of bread was divided in two. It was not much for teenagers"*. The first year, Betram survives thanks to his classmates. He borrows books at the library. Then he receives a scholarship from the government. Later on, a grant from the Egyptian government allows him to do four years of university studies in Alexandria. Graduated with a BSc in Agronomy, he returns to South Sudan, and works in Malakal at the Department for Plant Protection under the Ministry of Agriculture. Then, as a result of raids of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), government troops take possession of the Ministry building. As Betram complains of not being able to work, he is treated with suspect by the Security and joins the huge numbers of the population who are fleeing what has become a civil war between North and South.

That is how, in 1989, he comes to Khartoum. He is 27 years old. He can resume his work for the Ministry of Agriculture. One day **in 1992**, he meets a doctor who works benevolently for SVDP Friday clinics in Khartoum. **He then joins SVDP**, run by Kamal Tadros, to help the hundreds of thousands of South Sudanese living in the displaced camps around the capital. His experience in agriculture greatly ensures the development of the vocational training centers and the farms for the street children.

He converts to Catholicism **and in 1994 he gets married**. The very day after his wedding, he is obliged to go to SVDP's office, then in turmoil because of the hostility of the authorities.

Then his family flees the war raging in Sudan and emigrates to Egypt.

Encouraged by Kamal, Betram furthers his education **in Germany at the University of Bonn, where, in 2004, he graduates with a PhD in Agronomy**.



At the Louvre in Paris, next to Delacroix's "Young orphan at the cemetery"

He then joins his family in Australia, where they have emigrated meanwhile. His language skills allow him to work for five years in administrative services dedicated to the reception of immigrants.

Each year, however, he returns to Khartoum to help the SVDP teams.

He eventually decides to return full time to Sudan to devote himself to the programs set up by SVDP. After the 2005 peace agreements, he is in charge of the implementation of projects in the South, and becomes the coordinator of SVDP programs in Juba, where he moved before the creation of the nation in 2011.

In December 2013, his wife, who had come to Australia to attend her mother's funeral in Malakal, finds herself trapped by the outbreak of the civil war. She is fortunately airlifted to safety by the Royal Air Force, and with her, fly away any chance of his family returning to Juba.

Thus he only visits his wife and their six children once a year at Christmas. His wife works part time as a childcare professional. His youngest son recently asked him on the phone why he is not living with them in Adelaide. Betram explained that he's got a second family in South Sudan... with more than 600 children (who are benefiting of SVDP programs)!

THANK YOU for helping us to support his work for the poor!

Patrick Bittar, Director