

UNDER TREE SCHOOLS

Note of a meeting with supporters at St Mary's Barnes, at noon on 4 October 2008

Present: see list at end

1. The chairman of trustees, Revd Ross Collins, welcomed those present, who had travelled from near and far, including from Switzerland and from Cologne.
2. Ruedi Gebendinger of the Winterthur Association in Switzerland presented a pictorial introduction made by them of the development of the Under Tree Schools project. The Association was warmly thanked for an excellent production.

PROGRESS AND PLANS

3. Peter Boyling, administrator, reported. UTS had been allocated by the community of Malek a large area on the edge of the town for the school. Since the start of building work we had created accommodation for teachers and visitors: 12 circular huts, including one big one for meeting and eating, all built and roofed. Two school blocks, each of four classrooms, had been built: one has been roofed; the other is ready to be roofed. Foundations had been laid for a third block of the same size, to hold a staff room for teachers, the headteacher's offices and storerooms. A borehole for water has been dug for water. The building has been done in traditional style, but to a high quality so it will last. Local materials and labour had been used where possible, but cement, metal roofing and wood had to be brought in.
4. The second classroom block and the teachers' block need to be completed. Then doors and windows (already on site) need to be put into all the buildings and furniture made for all the accommodation. A second borehole is needed, and basketball courts and football pitches. Joseph plans that this can all be finished by March. He plans to buy a truck to save hire costs of vehicles and provide a long term asset for the school.

FINANCES

5. Ian Sykes, Treasurer, reported. Since UTS became a company in October 2006 our supporters have raised £216k. Administration in the UK has cost about £12k, about 5% of the total, to fund printing, audit, travel within the UK etc. Our donors include 23 churches and 17 other organisations, and 10 individuals now give regular donations. 380 one off donations have also been received.
6. Estimated costs for the future are uncertain, as unit costs as well as exchange rates vary. But subject to those caveats we currently believe we have the £31k we need for the autumn work. We are short of £7k of the £44k we need for the work in January-March 2009, and we need this £7k by Christmas. We then need £30k by Easter for the work in the April to June quarter (including clothes for children and teaching materials, and their transport to Malek, as well as teachers' salaries). After that we need £25k to build the library/assembly block, the dispensary etc, in the autumn. We need about £10k per quarter to pay staff wages and other continuing costs.
7. In answer to questions Peter explained that we were expecting to have to meet teachers' wages for a year or so; although the Government intended to fund

our teachers it took some time for the funds to come through. Joseph explained that he would select for the school 300 girls who had not so far had any education. He anticipated that boys among the 700 children currently being taught under the trees would be found places by the Government in a school they were currently rebuilding in Malek. The chairman undertook that when finalised the UTS accounts would be accessible from the UTS website.

REPORT BY JOSEPH

8. Joseph said he was sometimes asked whether big organisations could help UTS with funds. But they were often not willing to fund small projects. The UK Government and big NGOs wished to provide its grants via the Government of Southern Sudan, and the Government wanted to be involved in the organisations it grant aided, which would threaten our independence. The UN was reluctant to fund Christian organisations: while we planned to admit Christian and non Christian pupils, we were setting up the school for Christian reasons – to help people in need. Nevertheless we continued to seek grants.

9. His vision for UTS was to develop relationships between people. He wanted to build connections between western schools and the school in Malek. It was essential that visits took place. This would help children in the west to realise that they were lucky to be able to go to school and get breakfast. Sudanese children might have to walk 10 kms to school every day. They only ate one meal a day, in the evening, unless they picked berries or caught a fish or rabbit for breakfast. They went to school because they wanted to learn. For Europeans to visit the school would enable them to report back to their people the realities of Sudanese life.

10. He wanted to enable the building up of people. Buildings themselves can be temporary but building people can achieve lasting benefits, as he had seen, having ministered to people in Ugandan refugee camps and then met them again later in Juba. His sister had been married off at 15 as she was a burden to her family; she had died young in childbirth. Girls should not expect just to be used for child bearing and cooking. They should be encouraged to be independent.

11. The political situation was unpredictable though he was hopeful that neither North nor South wanted a return to war. He had been born into a civil war when people got no education. Many fled abroad and now did not plan to return as they had financial security and could better support their families. There was some resistance to the ideas promoted by those who did return, on the ground of their being too westernised. Lack of education had led to people having no vision and to despair: they were not used to planning, and did not want to put down roots for fear of war returning. UTS's school should help people to settle down and focus on the future. Things you work for are better than things you are just given, so he wanted to develop vocational training for the people of Malek, to help them learn skills such as hygiene, sewing with machines, primary health care.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

12. Peter Dixon, chief executive of the charity Concordis International, spoke about means of resolving conflict. Schools needed political stability to survive. He had been working for 8 years in Sudan; and Concordis had earlier played a role in the peaceful transition achieved in South Africa and other countries. The organisation sought to build lasting peace through bringing together inclusive groups

of people of middle rank for informal discussions out of the limelight. The aim is to build trust at policy level over an extended period by getting parties to identify common goals and aspirations. They tackle long term causes of problems, deriving often from inequities in meeting basic needs, such as supply of land, water, shelter, livelihoods and human security.

DISCUSSION

13. In answer to questions Joseph said:

- we no longer needed a full health clinic at the school as there was to be a clinic in the town. The operators of that clinic had agreed to support a dispensary at the school, and provide trained staff as needed, eg for vaccinations;
- he considered road travel to be safe, as there were now no local sources of tension;
- we would be building on the Southern Sudanese Government curriculum. This required education in different faiths. Our school would give extra emphasis to Christianity. 15% of the local people were committed Christians and there were no Muslims in the area. The majority of the people were African traditional worshippers and a number of the girls admitted to the school would be from their families;
- the language of the curriculum was English;
- the trustees envisaged that while no fees would be charged initially, the school would ask parents to supply an animal to the school (as in the British period of rule). The girls would learn how to look after them. Vocational training in agriculture would be economically important for families in this fertile area;
- the school would be a day school. Perhaps in the future there might be consideration of creating boarding accommodation if needed;
- tension was created not only by North/South issues. There were 60 tribes in Southern Sudan and the competition between them led to problems within the Government and indeed the church.

14. It was suggested, and agreed, that it would be useful to put on record the UTS achievements of the past two years, eg in funding secondary education for young people in Uganda and Kenya, some of whom were now helping with the school.

15. It was noted that visits of several weeks to carry out project work in development areas were undertaken by the charity Soapbox. Ross confirmed that we were very interested in such approaches and during the visit for the official opening of the school in April 2009 we would do a reconnaissance for different types of visits.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

16. Ross explained that trustees would welcome help from supporters in spreading information about UTS, eg to churches, schools and other organisations. Trustees would be happy to provide publicity material for presentations. They would also be ready to make written submissions to bodies or make visits to speak to them.

17. He warmly thanked the four founding trustees who had supported Joseph from 2005: Stephen Winter, David Skidmore, David Jenkins-Handy and Ian Sykes. They had recognised and shared Joseph's dream and kept the project alive at a crucial time. He made a presentation to David Skidmore, who had just retired as a

trustee, and had helped keep the organisation rooted in important practicalities. He welcomed Moira Laffey who was one of three new trustees just appointed to UTS and he gave special thanks to Karin Ayok-Loewenberg for her special contributions to the charity. The meeting thanked Sue Adams and her helpers warmly for the provision of an excellent lunch. And Ross closed the meeting with thanks to all those who had been able to make the journey to join the meeting.

Present:

Supporters: Mrs Sue Adams, Mr Santino Akol, Mrs Ricarda and Mr Hans-Guenter Appelt, Mr Phil and Mrs Helen Bladen, Ms Sally Blenkinsop, Ms Susan Blenkinsop, Mr Peter and Mrs Claire Boyling, Ms Nicola Brook-Sulman, Mr Tim and Mrs Loraine Budgen, Mr Gavin and Mrs Christine Chittick, Mrs Celia Cleave, Mrs Barbara Cottier, Mr Peter Dixon, Revd David Durston, Dr Richard du Parcq, Miss Christabel Gairdner, Mrs Brenda Halsey, Mr Markham and Mrs Dorothea Jackson, Mr Peter Kain, Ms Isabel Kelly, Mrs Christine Ljunghammar, Mr Thomas and Mrs Helen Muortat, Mrs Maxine Neely, Mr John Newton, Major Iain and Mrs Jane Radford, Mr David Skidmore, Mr Dave and Mrs Wendy Wriglesworth, Mr Ruedi Gebendinger (Chairman), and Ms Susanne Hauert from the Swiss Association "Schulen unter Baeumen", Winterthur.

Trustees: Revd Joseph and Mrs Karin Ayok-Loewenberg, Revd Ross Collins, Dr David Jenkins-Handy, Mrs Moira Laffey, Revd Stephen Winter, Dr Ian Sykes.

6 October 2008