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Dear Friends

Welcome to this Spring update on our school in Malek Alel.

Since our last newsletter, in which we spoke of signs of optimism in the country, South Sudan has been hit by the dreadful violence that western media have reported. There has been a great deal of fighting between the ex Vice President's supporters and the Government forces. Tragically many people have died and 800,000 made refugees. A ceasefire was negotiated but has not been fully observed, and attempts to reach a full settlement are moving slowly. This is so sad for a country that desperately needs peace in order to begin to thrive.

The rebels include a number of the Nuer tribe, and since the President is a Dinka, the struggle has simplistically been described as tribal. What has not been reported in the media is that Riek Machar and some of his followers have channelled government funds into their own accounts to fund their aspirations for the future election. That was one of the reasons that they were sacked last summer. Riek Machar has been part of the government for many years, but never chose to use political avenues to raise his issues. He chose to resort to violence again as he did in the early 1990ies under President Garang, and as in the past uses various groups including from Sudan to further his own agenda.

The trouble has been mainly in areas which are home to Nuer, so purely Dinka areas such as the area in which our school is based have remained safe. A small blessing at a very difficult time.

So far the oil flow has not been affected, but it is a contested area and the stability is of vital importance to South Sudan and Sudan's political and economic development.

Joseph remains in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Juba, as the Government tackles the extra problems it now faces. Peace and reconciliation remain firmly on the agenda. He hopes soon to learn to which country he will posted to as Ambassador.

To read a recent article written by Joseph in response to events in South Sudan, follow this link: <http://www.undertreeschools.org/news.html>



Meanwhile the school was able to open in mid-February for the new school year, now our sixth. As in past years the demand for places has meant that the school is full, with about 350 pupils in its eight years from age 6 – 15, and also children in the nursery.

They all have their new free school uniform for the year and they continue to get their hot lunch daily.



While the area of the school is peaceful it cannot avoid being affected by the circumstances in other parts of the country. Government funds have not been flowing and so teachers have not been paid. Transport of goods is more difficult, therefore prices are even higher than before. We hope that these are temporary problems.

We've got some really good news in our school. As you know, we have always wanted the girls from our school to be able to go on to secondary school. This would provide them with the skills which would open doors towards training for careers, a real alternative to early marriage. We are delighted that we have now been able to start the scheme for bursaries that we spoke of in a recent newsletter. The bursaries will pay the fees and expenses of attending secondary schools in the area. The first 10 girls started at local secondary schools in February and the funds have already been raised to finance them all for this year! This is thanks to Sue Davies in south west London who volunteered to fundraise specifically for the bursaries. She and a handpicked team are now making contacts and planning events to raise the funds for the 10 girls for their remaining three years at their new schools and - they hope - to provide funds for more girls to follow them in future years.

Many thanks and congratulations to Sue for enabling us to start this new initiative.

We are as ever so grateful to you for your support and donations you send us. This enables us to continue to fund the basic running costs of the UTS school, including wages, food, school supplies and maintenance and repair of the buildings. If you can think of someone, or a school or church perhaps, whom you might be able to enthuse about Under Tree Schools please have a go – their donations would help strengthen the finances of the school above the current precarious situation! You could direct them to the video we made last year about our girls and the school in Malek, and the dedication of the new chapel. The link is on our website:

<http://www.undertreeschools.org>

The 11 minutes long the video gives a good feel for what life is like at the school.

Also, we've signed up with Btmydonate to make online giving easier:

<https://mydonate.bt.com/charities/undertreeschool>

Can you let us know if your address has changed or if you are able to receive our newsletter by email instead of a paper copy please?

Please note our new address in the letterhead. As a family we are now based back in Dorset where we lived over 10 years ago.

This letter comes with our sincere thanks for your continued prayer support and for your many other ways of supporting our school and community in Malek.

With our warm wishes and God's blessings

Karin and Joseph Ayok-Loewenberg