

Rev. Joseph and Mrs Karin Ayok-Loewenberg
52 Boileau Road, Barnes, London SW13 9BL



Tel: 0044 (0) 20 8255 8459
Email: ayokloewenberg@fastmail.fm
www.stmarybarnes.org/UTS

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UNDER TREE SCHOOLS – A GIRLS' SCHOOL IN SOUTHERN SUDAN

Dear Friends

This is our latest newsletter to keep you up to date with progress with our charity's project to build a school for girls. Many thanks for all your support!

The new Government in Southern Sudan is beginning to rebuild an education system from the ruins of decades of civil war. But their limited resources are being focused on boys. The new country needs educated girls and women too, if its communities and economy are to develop.

We are building a school for 300 girls in the town of Malek, in the area Joseph grew up in. It will be a beacon for education throughout the region, drawing on the vitality of the people and on the resources we can share with them.

Where are we now with the project?



Our wonderful supporters have contributed very generously and Joseph has directed the work of using the funds wisely to build classrooms and accommodation for teachers. Four classrooms are roofed, and four more will get a roof at the end of the rainy season. 12 huts for teachers have been built in a fenced compound, a toilet block, and the foundations are laid for the offices. We are thrilled to have a borehole – an accomplishment that takes a bit longer than just typing this sentence! And the outcome is water!

The local people are helping professional builders; and the children are bringing stones for breaking into chips for concrete making. Local community leaders are very supportive of the project and the management committee comprises a cross section of the community.

What's next?

When we have further funds we need the key remaining buildings to provide an assembly room and a library. But regardless of finishing the building we want to open the school next April, so Joseph is planning to appoint a headteacher and staff. He will register the 300 girls who will get places. The girls will need suitable clothes so their mothers will let them leave their homes. And they will need educational materials. The funds are not stretching as far as one would expect in an African country, due to the inflation and very high building costs. We are drawing up careful financial plans.

Is the area of the school safe?

We had hoped to open the school in April this year, and some of us were wanting to be there for the great day. But there was tension in the area at that time, and Joseph had to postpone the start. Although peace returned to the South of Sudan with the Peace Agreement of 2005,

there are some remaining points of difference between North and South, centering on drawing borders, with access to oil and other minerals an incentive for both sides to seek advantage over the other. An agreement on managing oil resources in the region north of the school has brought security back to Malek, and the prospects for opening look bright again.

Development of the new Southern Sudan

Any new country faces real problems, and although the UN and the EU are helping, the new Government of Southern Sudan is struggling with internal arguments over how to allocate its resources. Much of the funds is going to the armed forces, reflecting a continuing fear that the North will resist the plans for a referendum on independence planned for 2011. Much of the oil in Sudan is in the South and the Northern Government in Khartoum will not want to lose its current 50:50 share of the income that comes from selling it. Stability and trust will take a long time to build. So we can expect public resources for schools to come through only very slowly.

We feel passionately that people need to be “rebuilt” now and we want to do all that we can to offer education and skills that help the communities to move forward. We can't wait for the Government to act.

How can we help?

Prayer is the foundation of everything; please continue to pray for a lasting solution!

We want to build relationships between the children and adults of Malek, and communities in this country. Can you encourage your own contacts to adopt us as a charity – perhaps your local school or church? We would love to come and visit schools and churches who are interested in a closer knowledge of life in rural Africa.

We still need more funds for the building work and for managing the school. Thank you for the help you have already been able to give through events and activities. If you can pay tax, please Gift Aid your donation – there is a form on the website and in our brochure, or let us know you want to.

We need to ensure the new teachers get a sound training, and we are looking for a small number of experienced people who could spend time with them.

Come to our Annual Meeting!

Why not have a day out in sunny southwest London, and come to our Annual Meeting? It will be at noon on Saturday 4 October, at the church of St Mary's Barnes. Lunch will be provided. There will be very little “admin”. Instead we will be inviting people who know about Sudan to discuss with us the prospects for the country and our aims of improving education and developing relationships with the Southern Sudanese people. Let us know you are interested and we will send you any more details you would like.

Information about the charity

We are very grateful for the chairmanship of Rev. Stephen Winter over the last three years. Stephen remains closely linked with the charity, but due to increasing other commitments he has decided to step down as chairman. We are delighted to welcome as our new chair of trustees Rev. Ross Collins, Team Rector of Barnes, who has been a trustee for two years. If you would like to pass on information about us, we would like to send you copies of our brochure. There is information on our website. A friend made us a six-minute DVD of an interview by Joseph, and we can send copies to you or your contact.

And you could give your friends Under Tree School gift certificates. If you would like to give a donation and receive in return a gift certificate, please tell us (see also details on the website).

On behalf of the community in Malek, many thanks! God's blessings for the summer,

Karin and Joseph Ayok-Loewenberg