



**FRIENDS OF
IBBA GIRLS SCHOOL
SOUTH SUDAN**

March 2017

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If you feel you're able to contribute please do so through our link [HERE](#) to Virgin Money Giving! Every contribution counts and anything you do will make a huge difference to our cause! Thank you, from all of us.



Responding to the Crisis in South Sudan

2nd March 2017

Dear Friends

Several of you, from many parts of the world, have responded to last week's News Letter about the re-opening of IGBS for Year 4 by sending further donations and standing orders to support the school and the new 40 ten-year-old girls enrolled into Primary 4 (making 160 students in total now enrolled in P4, 5, 6 and 7). Thank you so much for this generosity.

However, many of you have also expressed concern about the security situation in South Sudan, and the famine affecting the North of the country. So we thought we should share some more details of the crisis and how we are trying to respond, to protect the school and its students and to promote learning as part of the peacemaking process.

And we show below why and how we support the approach argued (separately) by both Gordon Brown and Boris Johnson...

Too close to comfort

There is no escaping the fact that the political economic and social crisis facing South Sudan has deteriorated rapidly over the past few months. The conflict between different groups has deepened and extended across the whole of South Sudan.

The former Western Equatoria State (which is the catchment area for Ibba school) is no longer insulated from the troubles and the turmoil. Mercifully Ibba itself has remained calm throughout, but there has been fighting in Mundri, Yambio and Yei which are over 2 hours away by vehicle, but too close for comfort.

Here is not the place to try to analyse the roots of, or the solutions to, these complex long-standing conflicts, other than to say that they include battles over resources (land, water, oil), and over boundaries (which were badly drawn by previous colonial rulers, and left unhelpfully ambiguous in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement).

The President has recently announced a National Dialogue process to try to re-establish peace; and has called for a National Day of Prayer for peace and

forgiveness on March 10th. Time will tell how far these initiatives gain broad-based support across the splintering groups and competing interests.

The South Sudan churches of all denominations are also speaking out courageously, and have called for Pope Francis and Archbishop Justin Welby to visit South Sudan this year.

We monitor the security situation carefully through the regular bulletins from John Ashworth and from Solidarity's Brother Bill Firman (see copies in the News section of the FIGS website), and above all from our widespread contacts in government, churches and the local community.

FIGS and IGBS are responding practically to this insecurity in the following ways:

- FIGS and IGBS Trustees and Governors have developed and an Emergency Management Plan and procedures for the school.
- The Governors and Headteacher Richard Aluma keep in close daily touch with the County Commissioner, the army brigadier, and other government and community leaders across the State, to keep alert to any security risks.



The Board of Governors, along with Headteacher Richard Aluma and Director of Studies Vicky Dratia, are monitoring the security situation in South Sudan very closely.

- The school is built on a 73-acre site protected by a perimeter fence, and by a gatehouse with armed guards at the entrance.
- IGBS employs a team of committed security staff to patrol the school with torches throughout the night. They say that keeping the girls feeling safe at night is their contribution to the school's aim to provide a secure and stimulating place for learning.



We are very grateful to our dedicated security staff (clockwise from top left): Borote Yepeta, Thomas Franco, Oliver Kurayo and Micheal Sebit.

- Over the past 5 years we have worked very closely with the local community to develop a strong sense of ownership of and involvement in the life of the school. The new County Commissioner Tito Gersama spoke movingly in November, at a church and village meeting I attended, with over 400 people sitting under the mango trees, about their commitment to protecting IGBS and its students and staff from any trouble, because it was a school they had helped to build and develop – giving their land and their labour, using local materials (wood and mud bricks), and providing schooling and jobs for local people. This sense of local ownership provides the best security.

- The school also works hard to involve parents in the life of the school, both through the work of the parent teachers association and through termly Visitation Days to the school by parents and family members.



Some parents at the most recent Visitation Day.

Food, Famine and Inflation

The economy is also sliding into hyper-inflation, the banking system is breaking down, basic necessities (food and fuel) are becoming unaffordable, and daily life for many is intolerable. And now a dire man-made famine is occurring in Unity State and other northern parts of South Sudan which are most affected by the fighting – and international humanitarian aid is being mobilised.

Once again, mercifully, Ibba School is largely protected from this famine, as it is in a very fertile area, capable of feeding the whole of South Sudan.

We outline below the practical steps we are taking to make sure that the students are and remain well fed:

- IGBS grows much of the school's food on the campus – maize, aubergine, okra, greens, pineapple, mango.
- The IGBS Finance Manager Sonaa Santino buys other items (e.g rice and beans) in bulk at the best possible prices and they are stored at the school in readiness.
- We are developing plans to set up a fish farm on the school campus, both to improve the protein in the school diet but also to set up a small social enterprise to sell surplus fish locally and to generate income for the school.





The girls often help plant and to gather the maize crops.

Gordon Brown and Boris Johnson

Gordon Brown and Boris Johnson are not natural bedfellows but they both agree that investment in girls schooling is one of the best ways to promote peace and development.

In his role as UN special envoy for education, [Gordon Brown](#) has spoken powerfully about the need for education to be seen as a human right, and the Gordon and Sarah Brown Foundation has commissioned one of the best reports on Education in South Sudan: Investing In A Better Future. See this report [here](#).

[Only this week](#), Boris Johnson has also spoken out as Foreign Secretary arguing (on the basis of UN evidence) that encouraging girls schooling is the single most effective means of reducing poverty, child pregnancy, early marriage, infant mortality, and of promoting gender equality, women's emancipation, leadership, economic development, and peace.



IGBS as a Hub for Learning and Peace Making

So we cannot afford to wait till peace is fully secured before investing in education, but need to reverse the cause and the effect - schooling especially of girls is one of the main ways to normalise a society and to stimulate peace.

Please join us in keeping IGBS going, in spite of all the odds, as a small-scale demonstration project of good schooling in South Sudan, and of what peace might look like in practice. In later Newsletters, we will discuss how we are trying to share and spread the learning from IGBS with other schools and partners in South Sudan, and with the government at local, State and national levels.

This is why we support the call to be Bold for Change on International Womens Day next Wednesday March 8th.

Peace and Justice,
John



If you feel you're able to contribute please do so by clicking on the 'Donate' button below! Every contribution counts and anything you do will make a huge difference to our cause!

Thank you!

With our best wishes and warm thanks,

John Benington Chair, on behalf of the Trustees and Friends of Ibba Girls School

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