

Winter 2011-2012

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Building Pathways to Sustainable Peace

Girls' Education: A Road Less Traveled

In 2003, Achol Cyier Rehan walked hut-to-hut announcing her plans to start a school for girls in her home village of Akon. As mother to three young daughters, Achol dreamed of a proper education for all the village's daughters. With only 1 female for every 5 male students, many villagers scoffed at the relevance of educating girls. Among the earliest believers, however, was the Madut family. When the school opened in April 2003, 11 year-old Kerlina was among its 90 first-graders. In July 2003, Achol asked us to support the school and today, the Kunyuk School is bustling with 500 students, grades 1-8, housed in a permanent campus constructed by My Sister's Keeper. Achol, once considered a foolish dreamer, is now known as a visionary pioneer. In 2007, she became her county's first female commissioner. Today, she is Minister of Parliamentary Affairs in Warrap State. She boasts, however, that her signature accomplishment is the Kunyuk School for Girls.

Last year, Kerlina defied another set of odds—she completed primary school. Along the way, she encountered some of the same doubters who mocked Achol. They advised Kerlina to marry, drop out of school, and take her place in the home. In fact, that is just what 70 of her original classmates did. Kerlina, however, maintained her conviction that education is a key to a better life. She could not forget the difficulties of the civil war. "Everything was destroyed; our houses burned; we lost our cattle and goats. During the day, we were running to find a safe place. At night, we had to sleep in the bush." Determined to reverse the deprivation exacerbated by decades of war, Kerlina studied hard. In fact, she did so well on her placement exams that she won a scholarship to a boarding high school in South Sudan. Today, she has high hopes to become like Achol and work in the government, and she knows that education is the best pathway to lead her there.

We are proud of Achol and Kerlina, two of the many phenomenal leaders who have benefitted directly from your faithful support to My Sister's Keeper. With your continued investment we will make girls' education an expectation rather than an aberration!

What's Inside

Pg 1 | Investing in Girls' Education
Pg 3 | Kunyuk School Calendar

Pg 2 | Sisterhood for Peace
Pg 3 | Kunyuk School Needs

Pg 2 | Zeinab Balandia
Pg 4 | Patron Profile

Brilliant Investments for Bright Futures

My Sister's Keeper is taking a tip from two smart economists. In a 1994 article, *Investing in All the People: Educating Women in Developing Countries*, Larry Summers, then Chief Economist at the World Bank, observed, "When one takes into account all its benefits, educating girls yields a higher rate of return than any other investment available in the developing world." Robert Zoellick, current World Bank President, agrees. Speaking at the Bank's global Open Forum on Gender in September 2011, Zoellick declared, "Investing in girls is smart. It is central to boosting development, breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty, and allowing girls, and then women—50 percent of the world's population—to lead better, fairer and more productive lives."

We've identified 500 great investment opportunities—all students at the Kunyuk School for Girls in rural Akon! How about you? \$100 will provide a full scholarship to cover tuition, uniform, and school supplies for a needy girl and \$1,300 will allow one teacher to participate in our upcoming teacher's training. Give a smart gift and get an exponential yield!

"Because the one thing I keep saying to the young women and to my colleagues, we've left a legacy... but all of those legacies will only be a legacy if we have young women to walk in our shoes when we leave the stage."

—LEYMAH GBOWEE

Liberian Peace Activist

Featured in the award-winning

documentary "Pray the Devil Back to Hell"

Co-recipient 2011 Nobel Peace Prize

Sisterhood for Peace

Issues an Urgent Call for Action

While drums in South Sudan continue to pulse in frenetic celebration, drums in Abyei, Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile States are sounding a death knell. Once again the Khartoum government has launched a scorched earth campaign against its own people. Civilians are subjected to ongoing air strikes and artillery shelling by the Sudanese Armed Forces. Furthermore, the government continues to impose severe restrictions on international aid groups. In its Nov. 18, 2011 briefing, the USAID estimated the number of conflict-affected or displaced at more than 250,000.

Meanwhile, nine years after its onset, the crisis in Darfur persists as government armies regularly wage military offensives. Three million Darfurians remain displaced.

The actions of the Government of Sudan have been denounced by many human rights groups including the diverse women served by our Sisterhood for Peace (SFP) initiative. This network of grassroots women peacemakers reflects the geographic, religious, racial, and ethnic diversity of both Sudan and South Sudan.

In a statement of solidarity with the victims, the women urged the international community to immediately implement a no-fly zone to halt the deadly aerial bombardment; deploy UN peacekeepers to protect innocent victims; and ensure access of aid workers to address humanitarian needs.

The women echo the sentiments of our SFP colleague, Nania, in Nuba Mountains, "It breaks my heart as one's own government is committing such atrocities against its own people. We have nowhere to turn except to the international community... to intervene and do something."

In the wake of the current offenses, Sudanese citizens and Sudan activists have been profoundly disappointed by the relative inaction of our international leaders. Little has been said or done to compel the Khartoum government to cease and desist from its signature bloodletting. MSKeeper will continue to partner with our Sudanese sisters to stop the killing. Over the coming months, we'll be convening Diaspora women to provide advocacy training and support as they develop and implement actions to press Pres. Obama and other international leaders to "intervene and do something." To keep abreast of the troubling events throughout Sudan, please visit www.enoughproject.org , www.endgenocide.org , or www.sudanactionnow.org . Our sisters are counting on you to take action by lending your voice and your financial support today.

Spotlight on Refugee

Zeinab Balandia,

A Sister for Peace

Among the victims of the current crisis in Nuba Mountains is our Sisterhood for Peace colleague, Zeinab Balandia, founder of the Ru'sya Association. This is Zeinab's second time being forced to flee for her life. In 1992, Sudan's President Omar Bashir declared jihad on the region. 100,000 Nuba died in the attacks, many more were displaced and untold numbers were enslaved. For over 25 years, Zeinab has recruited and trained women peacemakers in the Nuba Mountains. As a human rights activist, she has been detained and arrested many times. While a new mother, her husband was arrested, disappeared and assumed dead leaving her to raise their infant daughter alone.

We visited Zeinab in her home in Kadugli in December 2010. She had helped to organize a peacebuilding conference that we facilitated for 30 women leaders in Southern Kordofan State. Most of our participants are now disheartened and displaced—including Zeinab. She fled her home in September 2011 and is now a refugee in Uganda.

I came out and there was heavy shooting. The government soldiers had looted our offices and posted a notice that no non-governmental organizations could work in Nuba Mountains. I couldn't stay in one place because they were looking for intellectuals and when they found them, they arrested them. Finally we decided to leave everything and save our lives. My sister and I were walking and running. I was pushing my 122 year-old aunt in a wheelbarrow. When we reached the airport, we boarded a bus and journeyed 3 days to Khartoum. Along the way there were security threats.

Now the Human Rights Defenders has resettled us in Uganda. However, I am here only for a short time.

I must return to Sudan and restart my work on human rights and peace. Determination will ensure peace. We won't stop until there is peace. -Zeinab Balandia

Like Zeinab and the other courageous women served by Sisterhood for Peace, we don't intend to stop until there is peace in all Sudan and South Sudan. We are committed to providing financial and technical support for Zeinab to organize other Nuba refugee women in Juba, South Sudan as they plan their next course of action. We need your contribution to support this work now.

South Sudan's G.P.A. (Growth Potential Advantage)

South Sudan has some of the world's worst indicators for education. However, it also has some of the best advantages for potential growth. The sheer resilience, lofty aspirations and dogged determination of its people are energizing. Fueled by your generous support, My Sister's Keeper will continue transforming the new nation's daunting challenges into great opportunities!

LOW NET ENROLLMENT*

More than half of all primary school age children are not enrolled in school. That puts the new country second-to-bottom in the world ranking for primary school net enrollment.

However, since the country's "Back to School" campaign was launched in 2005, primary school enrollment has increased from 300,000 to 1.3 million students—500 of whom are Kunyuk students.

SHORTAGE OF TRAINED TEACHERS†

96% of primary school teachers have no formal certification; 63% of primary school teachers have no teacher training at all. Just 12% of all teachers are female.

Currently, none of Kunyuk's 12 teachers are certified, however MSKeeper is working with the Kunyuk school community to organize a 3-phase teacher training starting in March 2012. Consistently 40% of Kunyuk's teachers have been women, which encourages many girls to aspire to become teachers as well.

UNSCHOOLED GIRLS*

While 10% of boys finish primary school, only 5% of girls finish. In fact, girls are 3 times more likely to die during pregnancy and in childbirth than to reach grade 8.

By comparison, the primary school completion rate for Kunyuk's girls is projected to be 12%. In 2003, Kunyuk began with 90 girls in first grade. In 2010, 3 of the girls finished 8th grade and began high school—including Kerlina! 8 more will finish in 2011 for a total of 11 girls out the initial 90. You go, girls!

INADEQUATE CLASSROOMS*

Most classes are in tents, under trees, or in semi-permanent structures; 1/3 of schools don't have access to safe drinking water; 1/2 are without latrines.

In 2009, My Sister's Keeper completed construction of Kunyuk's permanent campus with 8 classrooms, 4 latrines, staff offices, a kitchen, cafeteria, and nearby bore hole for pumping clean water.

Upcoming events at the School:

- Dec. 22, 2011: Last day of 2011 Academic Year
- Jan. 13, 2012: MSKeeper Administers Literacy and Numeracy Assessments
- Mar. 16-21, 2012: MSKeeper Teacher Leadership Training Institute & Summer Enrichment Camp for 100 Students
- Apr. 1, 2012: Students return for 2012 Academic Year

You can help. DONATE today:

- \$100 will provide a full scholarship for 1 needy student
- \$1300 will cover the cost of March 2012 teacher training for 1 teacher

* Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2011, Building A Better Future: Education For An Independent South Sudan, UNESCO, 2011

† The Status Of Teacher Professional Development In Southern Sudan, Martha Hewison, Management Systems International (MSI) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), 2009

Even Small Donations Can

Generate Large Outcomes

Sister Bridget Haase is a retired nun who has traveled the world in service to others. As a passionate humanitarian, she spent 5 years as a board member for My Sister's Keeper where she helped to raise over \$24,000 by collecting small donations, demonstrating that every little bit counts. She shares a bit of her story here.

"Bridge, I have a gift for you," exclaimed Emguoish as she came running towards me with her 10 year-old son Msai. It was time to say goodbye to this dear Sudanese friend. I was leaving Wadi Hileau in the desert of Sudan after a year of feeding children who were victims of famine and drought.

"Here is my gift," Emguoish repeated as she took Msai's hand and placed it in mine. "Take him as your own, Bridge. I ask only one thing for him... not money, food, or clothes. Only school."

Twenty years later I helped to build a school. I am honored, as an Ursuline sister, to acknowledge that my own religious community and caring friends had a hand in the cement walls, wooden desks, and simple uniforms. Most of my religious sisters are in their eighties and nineties and receive a small monthly allotment of \$5 - \$10 to do with as they wish. Each one could not think of a better way to sacrifice and share than for the children of Akon.

With word of the school's construction, others wanted to participate, as well. Our Ursuline Academy in Dedham, Massachusetts gave proceeds from a Mission Day, a retired presidential Secret Service agent in Maryland sent a generous monthly donation, a Maine family sent a contribution in memory of their young daughter who passed away, an entrepreneur and his wife in New Jersey shored up our fund each month, and donations from \$1 to \$100 from friends and strangers from California to Florida came with good luck wishes and a promise of prayers. These loving people followed the construction updates from My Sister's Keeper's newsletters and anticipated the day when the girls would move from classes under a Kunyuk tree to the security of a solid structure! Within five years, donations of nickels, dimes, quarters, and faithful gifts helped bring in \$24,000!

These dedicated people revealed to me the wealth of faith in believing that global education can happen; the challenge of fortitude in doing our part to the best of our ability; and the beauty of fellowship in reaching a goal together. Today, united as My Sister's Keeper, we can keep our promise to all the "Emguoishes" of Southern Sudan as we continue to aid in the education of their children. These children will structure a nation of peace, empowerment, and justice. In return, we can only humbly accept and treasure their thank-you to us: a future filled with hope.

Champion "Sister's Keepers"
Leave Rich Legacy

This year My Sister's Keeper mourned the deaths and celebrated the lives of 2 staunch supporters, Myra Kraft and Dr. Wangari Maathai.

The generosity of Boston-based philanthropist, Myra Kraft, extended all the way to Sudan and South Sudan. She began supporting My Sister's Keeper when we were just an idea. As wife to Robert Kraft, owner of the New England Patriots, and mother of 4 sons, Myra's world was dominated by men. But she was also a woman's woman with a heart for women's work. Upon returning from my first trip to South Sudan in 2001, I was anxious to mobilize advocates for southern women enslaved during the civil war. "Who will be your sister's keeper?" I asked. One day I was feeling somewhat discouraged, when Myra, unsolicited, handed me a five-figure check. "I will be my sister's keeper!" Myra's presence never left me. MSKeeper is here today, because a visionary Myra invested in our mission even before there were any programs to fund.

In 2004, Wangari became the first African woman and the first environmentalist to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. In 2008 I was honored to travel with Wangari and the Nobel Women's Initiative to conflict zones along the Burma-Thai border, Ethiopia, South Sudan and Chad. The three-week trip was emotionally, spiritually and physically draining. Wangari, however, never flagged. While utterly regal in stature, she was humble in demeanor. Her grace, intellect and compassion captivated audiences from ministers in the chambers of the African Union in Ethiopia to women in refugee camps in Chad. She became an ardent fan of our Sisterhood for Peace work and generously mobilized resources and relationships on our behalf. Wangari was our sister's keeper!

Will you be your sister's keeper?

I trust you're inspired by the "she-roism" of our sisters. Most of us will never know the ridicule that Achol encountered or the trauma that Zeinab is enduring. Despite great challenges, they are fiercely forging pathways to sustainable peace. Will you be your sister's keeper? If not you, who? If not now, when? As you look forward to a new year of greater blessings, please choose to give back in greater measure today. On behalf of our sisters in Sudan and South Sudan, thank you in advance for your generous donation.

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