

Wad-Sherifey School Closes Its 23rd Scholastic Year Colorfully in Attendance of Distinguished Guests

By
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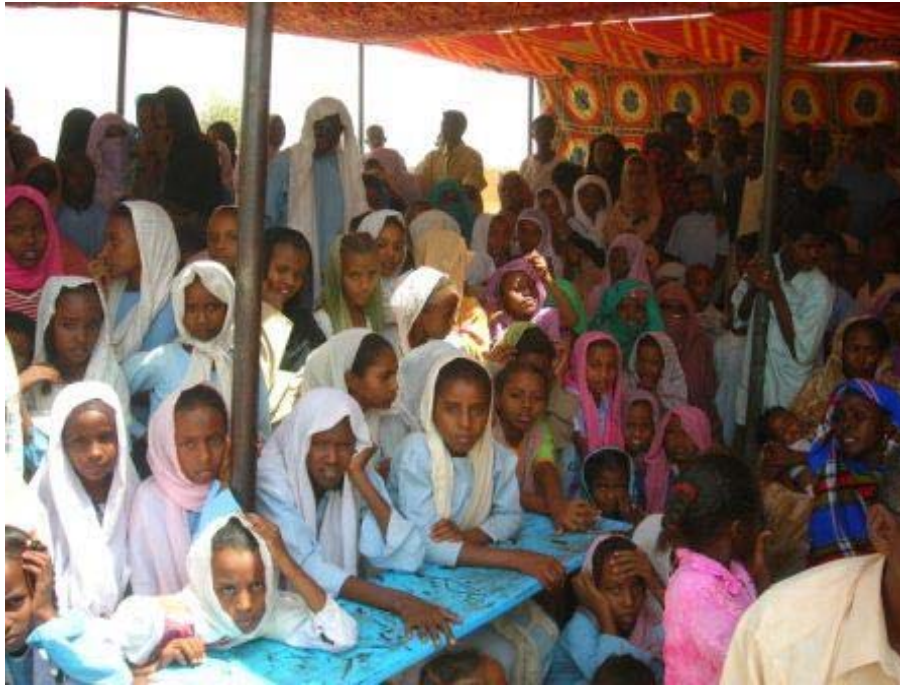
The Wad-Sherifey Elementary School for Eritrean refugee children, located only a stone's throw from the Eritrean border in Eastern Sudan, closed its current academic year on 16 March 2007 in a most colourful ceremony ever witnessed in the history of this school run by the Alliance of the Eritrean Red Cross/Crescent Societies (A/ERCS), a 33-year old humanitarian wing of the Eritrean Liberation Front – Revolutionary Council (ELF-RC).



The end of school year ceremony started in the morning hours soon after a convoy of delegations arrived from Kassala at Wad-Sherifey in company of senior Sudanese security officers.

On top of the ELF-RC leadership delegation headed by the chairman of the Executive Committee, Woldeyesus Ammar, the school closing day at Wad-Sherifey was honoured by the presence of a big delegation from Italy led by the indefatigable Aba/Padre Marino Haile of Milano, an Eritrean Capuchin priest with a distinguished service to Eritrean refugees in the Sudan and Italy, and a delegation of a new NGO in Switzerland committed to generate support for salaries of the teaching staff of the refugee school. The head of the ELF-RC Office for Social

Affairs, Gime Ahmed, presented short profiles of each of the nine delegates from Italy and from Switzerland.



Also attending the ceremony were leadership members of two major Eritrean opposition organizations, the Eritrean Democratic Party (EDP) and the Eritrean National Salvation Front (ENSF), which is a merger of former three member organizations of the Eritrean Democratic Alliance (EDA).

Speeches presented in Arabic and Tigrinia by representatives of the teaching staff, of students and of parents expressed the hope that the continuation, in an enhanced manner, of the Wad-Sherifey Elementary School for Eritrean Refugees is now more reassured than ever before thanks to a number of trustworthy benefactors committed to assist the education of children of poor refugee families. Children's songs, poems and dramas presented in Arabic, Tigre and Tigrinia by the children were extremely moving in content and shape. Many of them dealt about the situation in the country and about the problem of education versus marriage for girls. One song called "Aba" that paid tribute to the dedication of Aba Marino in helping refugee education was so profound and true about the man that it shook the emotions of almost everyone participant in the ceremony.



Speech by School Headmaster

In his welcoming speech, the school headmaster, Memhir Teklehaimanot Elfu, expressed great satisfaction about recent developments in the refugee school which was renovated with the generous support that Aba Marino and friends extended to it following their first visit in the spring of 2004. The headmaster recounted that the school was started in 1984 in mat tents (rakubas) before the school buildings were constructed by Dutch benefactors in 1988 to accommodate up to 800 children. He said international support sharply declined in the past several years and the school was in very bad shape till two years ago before it got the attention of Padre Marino and his support team of benefactors.

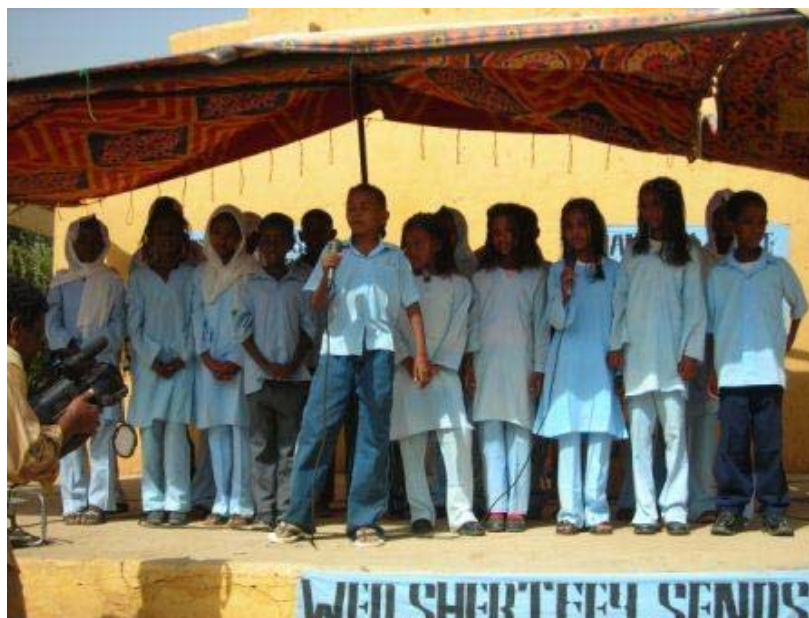
The Wad-Sherifey School headmaster, intimately called Wedi Elfu, warmly thanked all charitable organizations and individuals who continue to give hope and support to the refugee school and reminded that more is needed to keep it going until the eventual return of all Eritrean refugees back home in a democratic Eritrea. Besides making a special mention of Aba Marino and team, and commending Aba Ghebrai of Kassala for his close cooperation with Wad-Sherifey, Wedi Elfu also warmly welcomed and thanked Ms Ogba Tekle and Sophia W. Ammar, founder-leaders of a new Swiss NGO called ASEE (Association Suisse Enfance-Erythree) for their promising determination to support Wad-Sherifey School in many ways. He also deeply thanked a Sudanese NGO (al-Multeda al-Islami) which constructed water supply lines to the school during the past year, and the Sudanese Red Crescent Society for granting valuable medical services to the school children.

The headmaster further noted that the World Food Programme (WFP) has recently pledged to start a school feeding programme in the form of

breakfast as of June 2007. However, funds for the construction of kitchen and necessary utensils will have to be obtained within the shortest time possible.



The Wad-Sherifey school teaches between grades 1 and 6 to Eritrean children in Eritrean curriculum through the medium of Eritrean languages (Arabic and Tigrinia). Grades 7 and 8 are taught in English. Beyond grade 8, children who pass the exams join high schools either in the Senior High School of the Catholic Church in Kassala (formerly the ELF-run and UNHCR supported high school in Kassala) and other Sudanese schools. Wedi Elfu stated that his school ended the academic year with 510 students of whom 315 were boys and 195 girls. Over 90% of the children passed their exams and were happily promoted to higher grades.



Notes by the ELF-RC Chairman

The ELF-RC chairman, Woldeyesus Ammar, stated in a speech at the occasion that a number of good reasons made him feel happy and proud to be attending the school closing ceremony at Wad-Sherifey.

These included the fact of his attending the closing ceremony for the first time with young children and their refugee families amidst the presence of respectable personalities like Padre Marino and Rabattoni who are in possession of big altruistic hearts that never stop giving.



He also felt happy with the presence of his daughter Sophia at Wad-Sherifey, who first joined him as a child of 7 in the 1980s in collecting funds in Swiss streets for Wad-Sherifey, and still doing the same in a more effective way after 23 years. The ELF-RC chairman also deeply thanked the young school children for having mirrored correctly in the form of dramas, poems and speeches the sad situation in Eritrea and asked them to continue this spirit of struggle and resistance till the establishment of a peaceful and democratic Eritrea of all Eritreans. He then introduced Padre Marino to the audience and invited him to the stage to say a few words to the children.

Padre Marino Talking at Wad-Sherifey

After coming to the podium amidst a standing ovation, the Catholic priest of the Capuchin Friary started his speech with words of humility. He said the gratitude paid to him was more than what he deserved because the parents and the devoted teachers at the school, he said, were giving more to the poor children than any other benefactor. He took note of the needs of the school like additional renovations and the requested construction of a kitchen that would accommodate WFP's proposed school feeding programme and hoped benefactors would come up with the required funds.

Aba Marino stated that no one can say our country is in good shape today, and prayed that things would soon change to the better. He also reminded the children that they are going to be among the future leaders of our country and that there was a need for them to prepare for that task. He said no leader can be a good leader without good conscience and the fear of God, fear of Allah and that parents have the responsibility in helping their children become good adults.



It is to be recalled that Aba Marino had the good opportunity of carrying these clear messages to big gatherings he addressed at the school closing ceremony in Kassala on 15 March 2007 for about 600 children from three Catholic schools, and also at the closing ceremony of three Eritrean community schools in Khartoum on 17 March 2007. The delegation members that attended the ceremony at Wad-Sherifey also attended the other ceremonies in Kassala and Khartoum.

Rabattoni Asks for Quick Removal of Dictatorship

Like Aba Marino, Roberto Rabattoni was attending the Wad-Sherifey school closing ceremony for the second time, the first time being in 2004.



In his speech in Italian, that was translated both to Arabic and Tigrinia, Rabattoni thanked Padre Marino for giving him the opportunity of visiting and supporting Wad-Sherifey, a school for poor refugee children that deserved the sympathy of benefactors. Signor Rabattoni, who funds support centers for 25,000 needy children in Ethiopia, said Eritreans deserved peace and liberty in their newly independent homeland and wished to see the dictatorship in Eritrea removed within the shortest time possible so that he could see soon the children and their partents at Wad-Sherifey back in Eritrean schools inside democratic Eritrea. Rabattoni had played a key role in funding the renovations at Wad-Sherifey school two years.

Ogba Spoke of ASEE and of Wad-Sherifey

Speaking at the ceremony, Ms Ogba Tekle said she and Sophia W. Ammar were very much pleased to be at Wad-Sherifey representing ASEE (Association Suisse Enfance Erythree), a young NGO that she helped found with Sophia in 2004 to collect funds for the Wad-Sherifey refugee



elementary school. He said she was informed about the acute needs of the school in late 2003 by the current ELF-RC chairman and that it will be a great pleasure for her and Sophia and their colleagues in Switzerland to be striving to help this worthy project.

Engineer Tekel Alemayehu

A man who served Eritreans for 20 years as regional office head in Italy of the former Eritrean Relief Association (ERA), Engineer Tekle said he was very happy to discover the way to Wad-Sherifey in the good company of Aba Marino and team, and expressed deep admiration for the ELF-RC

and its humanitarian organs in their persistence to help those Eritreans who really needed help. He said Wad-Sherifey and those in it are the real Eritreans for him and he pledged to do his utmost to help Eritrean refugee children in the Sudan in close cooperation with Aba Marino and team of humanitarian activists.



The School Day Ceremony at Wad-Sherifey was coming to the end with the presentation of memorial presents to all the visiting guests mentioned above and others who included, a founding member of an NGO engaged in supporting projects for needy children; two humanitarian activists who travel to several places, and Nighisti Teklehaimanot, an assistant in the Milano office of Padre Marino. First, second and third prize winners from grades 1 to 8 received their prizes from Padre Marino and the ELF-RC chairman. The delegations returned to Kassala in the afternoon after a short meeting of the ASEE team (Ogba and Sophia) with the administrative and teaching staff of Wad-Sherifey school.

