



OUR SALESIAN PATRONS AND HEROES

SEAN DEVEREUX

Sean, was born in 1963 in Yateley, England, and was a pupil at the Salesian College in Farnborough between 1975 and 1982. After obtaining a degree in geography and education at Birmingham and a post graduate certificate in education in Exeter, in 1986 he became a teacher in the Salesian School in Chertsey, Surrey. During these years he was an enthusiastic and active member of the Salesian Cooperators and of the Past Pupils. He took part in many activities for youngsters in England and overseas. In one of his trips abroad, while taking part in a meeting he took an important decision for his future life: he would leave for Africa as a volunteer with the Salesians in February 1989 when he was able to leave for the Salesian Mission in Tappita, where he began working at St. Francis School. When the school was closed as a result of the outbreak of the civil war in 1990, Sean began to work with the UN, as a volunteer, coordinating food distribution, first in the more remote parts of Liberia, then among the Liberian refugees in Guinea. The great decision of his life had been made: he was in one of the poorest countries in Africa helping children and youngsters; and he would have continued to do so until his contract with the UN ran out.

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His opposition to the war created problems for him with the rebels who on one occasion beat him up badly. In September of 1992 he returned home in and then began to work with the UNICEF and was sent to Kismáyo in Somalia, 250 kilometers south of Mogadiscio.

One of his letters written on November 15, gives a dramatic account of the sad situation of the country: "No doubt you have been exposed to the horror pictures [On TV] of starving children. Sadly it is a reality that has been brought about by man's greed and not by natural disaster... Life for myself is very up and down. I get so frustrated and fed up when I have to deal with the authorities, the guards and the contractors. In contrast I get such a life when I get a chance to move out into the field and see how the feeding centers and health posts are running and to regain contact with the more gentle face of humanity". His father says of him: "Sean found it terrible to have to bring help to the starving in Africa, fighting against everything and everyone.

Sean spoke openly about the anarchy in a country where the people were suffering so much, and about the insensitivity that was around; he condemned the corruption of the leaders and the selfish exploitation. This could have cost him his life! In the port of Kismayo on January 3, 1993, after he refused the armed escort that was almost compulsory in that country, (he never concealed his contempt for the war and the war lords who profited from it), an assassin's bullets put an end to the life of a courageous idealist. When we spoke to him about the dangers and the risks of his work his reply was always the same: "While my heart beats I have to do what I think I can do - and that is to help those who are less fortunate than me". Sean, the man with the bright smile, the man of courage, commitment, honesty, gave his life working to improve people's expectations and future prospects, so as to restore their dignity and prospects, so as to restore their dignity and hope! Africa needs people like him committed to creating hope and future.