

## **TOS IN EAST AFRICA**

Dear Brother Alejandro Bueno,

Thank you for your warm letter of inquiry regarding the TOS activities in Kenya and our Section. First of all, my sincere congratulations to you for heading the TOS work in Spain. TOS work is very important for any Theosophical Lodge, because TOS is the practical aspect of Theosophy and is often called 'Theosophy in Action'.

Here in East and Central Africa, we cover 4 countries - namely Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Zambia. Since a large percentage of the population in most of these countries is more or less barely making two ends meet, our TOS work is generally based on providing assistance in Education, medical and food.

In Kenya, we divide our work in providing assistance to 3 kingdoms: Vegetable and plant kingdom; Animal kingdom and Human kingdom.

Under the plant kingdom, our main work is of 'Planting Trees'. Like in many other countries, in Kenya, too, there has been a lot of irresponsible forest destruction. Forests and Trees are being cut down for making land available for the growing human population, for firewood and for making charcoal, and also for Timber for making furniture. There is no control in cutting trees and our forest cover which just half a century ago was almost 40%, is now reduced to almost 10%. We plant hundreds of trees, at a go, in forests and particularly at schools. Most of the schools here have very few trees and we assist in getting trees along the boundary of the school compound. At schools, even the school children are involved as they are made responsible to water the trees regularly and look after them. This year is the Centenary year of our Nairobi Lodge and just a couple of months back, 250 trees were planted at a school in Nairobi. This is an exercise, where we show our reverence to life in all forms and also help in reforestation. At times, we have also planted fruit trees in schools.

For the Animal Kingdom, we generally provide financial support to institutions and Societies that work for "Animal Welfare". The Kenya Society for the Protection and Care of Animals, is our favourite place. We have supported this society for Animal Welfare for many years. Infact, there is a kennel (one of the many) which has a plaque which has "Theosophical Society" written on top. Poaching of elephants for their ivory tusks is a major issue in Kenya. An organization that looks after and raises orphaned baby elephants is another place which is supported by our Society.

Under the Human Kingdom, for the past 40 years, we have been supporting students who cannot afford to pay school fees or tuition fees. We pay fees for needy students all the way from their primary education, to their college education. This is one activity that needs a lot of finances. In Africa, there is a lot of thirst for education, but many students drop out after their primary education, due to lack of fees.

Unlike in the west, the overall poverty levels are high in Africa. There are many families which cannot provide the basic necessities of the family. As a result there are many Homes for the abandoned children or old aged homes. We continually provide food, rations, blankets, etc for these homes that are generally run with support from different charities.

In spite of Africa being very famous for wildlife, many children from the poor background have never seen any of the big animals in real life. So, once in a while, we take selected students for a visit to the animal orphanage or National Park. The joy and surprise on their faces is a joy to behold.

Blindness is quite prevalent and not much assistance is always available for the blind people. There is very little braille literature available. In the early years, when we had several young members, our young members would go and read for a few hours individually different books to these blind people.

In Tanzania, the youth group members had a project called "Hope Heart Babies" where they would raise funds for babies whose hearts needed medical or surgical treatment. The cost of their treatment was all paid by the TOS in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

In Zambia, some years ago the TOS used to organize a "Public speaking contest" for students from high schools. Several different topics with Theosophical values would be given and students would select a topic and speak for 5 minutes. At one time this event was quite popular and very well participated. It brought a lot of publicity, nationally to the Theosophical Society.

In Nairobi, we have organized blood donation drives to help the blood bank collect blood for emergency uses. We regularly organize Christmas parties for needy young children from different areas. The parties would include activities like puppet show, clown show, magic show, face painting, and lots of food including cakes, chocolates, etc. All children would go home with a good Christmas gift. For most children this would be a dream come true.

In the past, on our International Foundation Day, 17th November, we have provided large quantities of maize, rice, sugar, cooking oil, stationery like exercise books, pencils, blankets, sheets, soap, etc to several homes that care and look after the young and the aged.

In recent years, we have provided fees to unemployed youth, for undertaking courses in gardening, landscaping, cooking and tailoring. Many of these youth have managed to get meaningful employment and are able to support their families. At times, our members have also provided counselling services to those in need.

In short, we try to help who ever we can, with whatever resources we are able to collect.

Hope the above will give you some idea on the type of work we do under TOS and is useful to you. If you have any more questions, please feel free to write to me.

Thank you & Good Day.

Narendra.