

Sasse Alumni Association Inc

"An Alumna Association of the Ex-Students
of St. Joseph's College, Sasse-Cameroon"
A 501(c)3 Charitable Organization



SOBA AMERICA

Office of the President

MEMORANDUM

June 25, 2021

TO:
The Board of Directors/NEC – SOBA America
Members of SOBA America

Re: Dinner and NLT meeting with His Lordship Bishop Michael Bibi, Proprietor of SJC Sasse

Fellow SOBANS ,

On Wednesday June 23rd, 2021, First Lady Laura and I hosted a dinner for His Lordship Bishop Michael Bibi, Proprietor of SJC Sasse, at our residence in Waxhaw, NC. SOBA Carolinas was invited to the dinner, as well as a few members of the Charlotte community. Our guests were treated to a sumptuous dinner spiced by an assortment of fine Cameroonian cuisine with delicacies such as Timanambosa, Ekwang, Ndole, Poulet DJ, just to name a few. It was a warm and family atmosphere as we mingled and chatted with His Lordship, the priests who accompanied him and fellow SOBANS and community members.

After dinner, the National Leadership Team members present – Secretary Divine Tange from MN and CAO/Financial Secretary Edwin Atem from GA – and I met with Bishop Bibi for a summit to discuss issues concerning our Alma Mater including suggestions and concerns from SOBANS. The meeting was very productive. Here are some highlights and important takeaways from the meeting.

Bishop Bibi reaffirmed his commitment to ensuring that SJC Sasse gets the attention it deserves and the work it needs to bring it up to the level we all want – a well maintained and effectively managed institution with its rightful place as a historic landmark and institution in Cameroon. He acknowledged the longstanding concerns that SOBANS have had which stems in large part to disappointment with the way things have been done in the past. He pointed to the fact that he has started making changes in the Diocese to begin to fix some the issues that go even beyond Sasse, but are clearly the root causes of some of the issues SOBANS have. His goal is to restore credibility, transparency, and accountability within the Diocese. These, he pointed out, are necessary for SOBANS and parishioners to rebuild and regain trust in the Diocese.

ADDRESS

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We thanked Bishop Bibi for his willingness to work with us and for the actions he has taken so far to begin the work needed to get SJC Sasse back to where it needs to be. After being abandoned for three years due to the current Anglophone Crisis, the campus was essentially inhabitable. Bishop Bibi made a commitment to get students back on campus. He embarked on an extensive renovation project across campus – the refectory, the main block, the chapel, the dorms etc. He also started enacting a fence around the main campus to help increase security of the students. The fence will be completed soon. He also took other significant steps to increase the safety and security of the students. When the dormitory caught fire, he took quick steps to fix the dorm – replacing the roof and addressing other damages in order to restore the look of the campus, while continuing to develop an overall long term strategy for the school. Bishop Bibi noted that he did all these, without asking for assistance from SOBANS or anyone else, because he understands that as proprietor, he is ultimately responsible for the upkeep of the school. He takes his responsibility seriously and understands the concerns of SOBANS. He reassured us that he will continue to work to improve Sasse College which he holds dear to his heart. He reaffirmed his commitment to working with SOBANS to address issues needed to improve our alma mater.

Bishop Bibi noted that after three years of abandonment of the campus and an enrollment now that is just about 300 students, the journey to get Sasse College campus back to where it needs to be will take time. While he understands the concerns of SOBANS and shares those concerns, he urges patience and trust. He urges SOBANS not to live in the past but to look ahead and work together in partnership with the authorities to achieve our common goal for Sasse. He hopes that SOBANS will see and appreciate the progress being made and continue to share ideas on how things can be improved.

We shared some recommendations from the SJC Vision Committee (which I had previously discussed with His Lordship), and some ideas and questions from SOBANS. Here are some important commitments made and answers to some of the concerns.

1. **Maintenance Budget for SJC Sasse:** The proprietor of SJC Sasse made a commitment to allocate 25% of the net revenue generated by SJC Sasse annually for maintenance and upkeep of the school. While we initially proposed 20%, Bishop Bibi made it clear that his plan for his schools in the Diocese was to separate the accounts and seek to make each institution self – sustainable. The 25% allocation for maintenance was already in his plans for SJC Sasse and other institutions in his Diocese and parishes in his Diocese.

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2. **Creation of a Heritage Board:** We recommended the creation of a St. Joseph's College, Sasse Heritage Board that will manage and oversee maintenance of SJC Sasse. The Board would be comprised of stakeholders and report to the Proprietor of SJC Sasse. The Board would assess the situation and generate a 5 to 10 year development/maintenance plan for Sasse. Funding will come from the school's annual maintenance budget (the 25% of net revenue agreed to above) and other sources that the Board will identify. This will achieve the following goals
 - a. Ensure continued maintenance and upkeep of SJC Sasse
 - b. Ensure a true partnership between SOBANS, other stakeholders (PTA etc) and SJC Sasse leadership/ownership for the good of SJC Sasse, as we all seek to realize a common goal.
 - c. Ensure transparency and accountability in the process.

Bishop Bibi endorsed the idea of the Heritage Board. He asked me to work with President General Iyok on details of the composition, charter and other aspects of the Board and present to him for his action to make it go operational. After our meeting with His Lordship, I had a meeting with SOBA President General Sammy Iyok Pride to brief him. He endorsed the idea of the Heritage Board and we started working on some of the details. We will continue to work together to develop this initiative, as well as the other matters that we have been working on.

3. **Recent changes of the Principal of SJC Sasse:** We asked the Bishop why there have been so many changes in the leadership of SJC Sasse recently. Bishop Bibi explained that his goal is to have the right leadership in SJC Sasse who will be able to steer the school in the right direction and satisfactorily address the concerns of parents, SOBANS and other stakeholders with regard to the matters within his jurisdiction. Unfortunately, there was a need to make this change as the high standards and expectations were not met. Bishop Bibi appointed Father Isaac Anuchem as Principal because of his experience, having done a great job as principal of BIROCOL for 7 years.

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4. **Selling Sasse to SOBA:** We brought this question up because it was a suggestion by some SOBANS when we solicited suggestions and questions for the Bishop. Bishop Bibi noted that, while he is the proprietor of SJC Sasse, matters pertaining to the ownership of the school, such as these, cannot be taken by him alone. He has a team of counsellors including legal counsel that will have to weigh in on such decisions. He is willing to take any detailed proposal to the council for discussion if we present one to him.
5. **Creating an investment ownership structure for SJC Sasse:** Once again, Bishop Bibi is willing to take any detailed proposals to the council for discussion if we present one to him.
6. **Other recommendations from the SJC Vision Task Team:** Bishop Bibi reiterated what he had told me in our previous conversations about the recommendations from the task team. He has reviewed them and is on board. He is willing to work with us to discuss implementing the recommendations once we have details on the different ideas. This would be a great task for the Heritage Board to work on also.

Overall, we had a very productive meeting. We thanked Bishop Bibi for his leadership of the Diocese and for his openness and willingness to continue working with SOBANS. The rest of the evening was filled with jokes and light conversations.

Following the meeting, I had a phone conversation with SOBA General President Ayuk Iyok. I briefed him on our meeting with the Bishop. President Iyok remains committed to the resolutions made. We will work together on the Heritage Board to get it up and running as soon as possible. Of note, we had previously discussed these matters, including the SJC Vision Task Team recommendations, and we are on the same page.

SOBANLY

Bertrand Fote
President of SOBA America (POSA)

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Appendix – A few photos to capture the event



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Bishop Bibi and members of the NLT of SOBA America – Sec Tange, Pres. Fote and CAO Atem Tail Terrace, Waxhaw, NC 281731

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Bishop Bibi with some SOBANS who were present. (Many had left prior to this picture).
From L to R: President Bertrand Fote, Bishop Michael Bibi Sec. Divine Tange, SOBAN Daniel Tahsoh
Behind LtoR: CAO Edwin Atem, SOBAN Eric Sede, SOBAN Julius Herbst, SOBAN Tom Ashu

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