

## Mindfulness Connection Hope

Over the past few years I have been very mindful of being remembered and held in prayer by members of CEN and many other people. My name is Nicole Rotaru and I am a Sister of Mercy who works with people in the Nuba Mountains, Sudan as a teacher, for four months each year. For the remainder of the year I work in Australia in the areas of family violence, loss and grief, and spirituality.

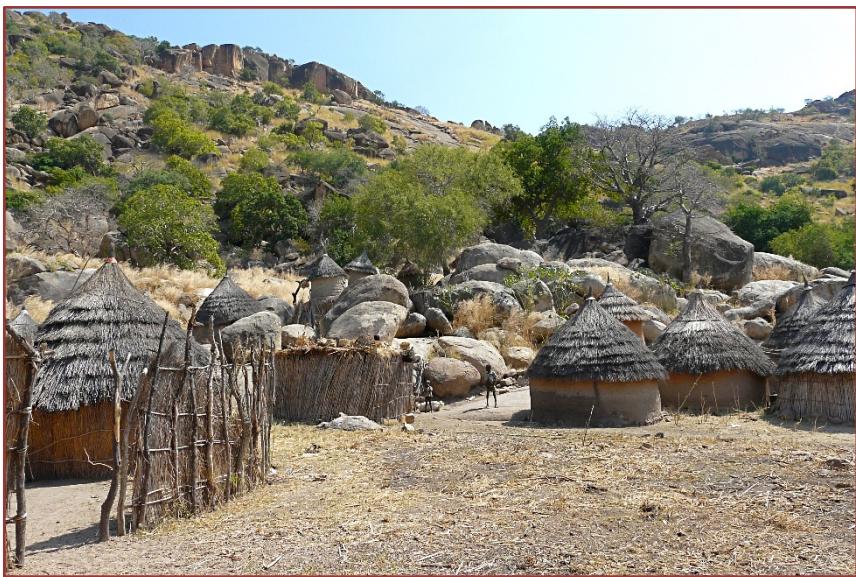
What follows is a glimpse into the environment of the Nuba Mountains, some of the Nuba people and the experience of connectedness through CEN.



The Nuba Mountains area is one of the most isolated places in Sudan. It is a wilderness of rugged mountains, dirt-rough roads that turn to mud in the wet season, countless seasonal rivers, mud brick tukels (traditional houses) with straw roofs, clumps of mango trees, plots of sorghum, maize and beans, boreholes, women carrying water and bundles of firewood, men looking after cattle, goats and sheep, and children playing with stones and dirt. The land holds a variety of precious minerals and the earth is fertile. The Nuba people are Christians, Muslim and animists, and live together in relative peace and goodwill. Peace, and the opportunity to develop their territory, is a common hope as they all struggle through the ravages of civil war.

Living in a state of constant alert is 'normal' for people here. At the sound of an antonov plane everyone runs to a fox hole for protection. When a jet passes, everyone drops to the ground immediately wherever they are. Thousands of people have died or suffered horrendous injuries

from flying shrapnel released by the bombs and missiles. Not one family has been left intact. Words are inadequate when one is sitting at the bedside of the wounded. A shared silence and the meeting of eyes perhaps bring some solace.



'frontline' too many times, said of a painting he did in one of my art classes, "*Life without hope cannot be.*"

Kamal shared the story of his painting, 'Beautiful Flowers', "*I started to think that I can do like other people in other worlds. It was just that I had no chance from the beginning. ...As Nuba we are not considered as human beings by other people. Sometimes we are called insects or animals. This is why some of the children cannot believe that they can paint - just like I believed - because we are not considered as human beings.*



my own journeying. When I tell my Nuba people that they are being remembered in prayer by people living in other countries, they are deeply touched and grateful. They are also amazed that their art works and accompanying stories are valued and appreciated by others. "Please greet all the people in Australia and tell them thank you". I smile every time I hear this - if they only knew how big Australia is!

The Nuba are a tenacious, resilient people. They have lived with war, hunger and isolation most of their lives. I marvel at their sense of purpose and hope. The following encounters with some of the Nuba people give a feel for what I mean:

Abram, a father whose son was killed by shrapnel told me, "*When I wake in the morning, I realise 'I'm still alive!' and I know God must have a purpose for my life.*"

Tisso, the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) explosives expert, who has been to the

*"Life without hope cannot be."*

Eklass, who is a student studying Early Childhood Development Education spoke with great enthusiasm about a painting she did of her land, "*I like walking in the Nuba Mountains - they shine with life. I feel so happy to see so many trees, flowers and grasses.*"

It is hard to fully describe my experience of living in such an isolated wilderness amidst people like Abram, Tisso, Kamal and Eklass. They express their pain and suffering, their joy and hope. Their 'spirit' inspires and urges me on in



When I return to Australia I pass on greetings from my Nuba friends and share some of their stories. Most of the stories I share tend to be about their faith, hospitality, gratitude, silence and hope. Increasingly I experience re-entry into our 'developed' world a much more challenging process than when I return to the Nuba Mountains. I often wonder what that might be about. At times I have a sense that many people here in Australia are trying to reclaim some of the simplicity and independence that I suspect underpins the Nuba people's faith, gratitude, silence and hope. Life in an isolated wilderness does not have the complexities of dealing with an overabundance of 'stuff' or the rush and noise that is part of life in a highly developed city society.

When some of my friends here talk about life, words like lost-ness, disheartened-ness and disconnection are not uncommon. A longing for connection to 'something' beyond the 'stuff', rush and noise is articulated – a connection to our deepest heart place! To hear such longing is like a soft hope humming and caressing those hard edges that can come with a highly developed citified world.

By connecting my Nuba people with some of 'the world' outside the Nuba Mountains I see them stand taller as they realise that other people recognise them as human beings, who have worth and dignity. That they are not forgotten, abandoned and discarded by the entire world. An experience of human solidarity is forged. Perhaps over time their story will be known a lot more and there will be an increasing recognition that the Nuba, like our indigenous peoples have much to offer us. May there be a deepening mutuality about this sense of solidarity through our mindful connections.

As I reflect on the experience of 'connection' through mindfulness in prayer with the CEN community my heart fills with gratitude. That connectedness goes beyond a transformation of isolation into connectedness, I sense a transcendence into a capacity to believe that people throughout the world can reach out to one another and foster and nourish each other's innate human potential for goodness. I sense a 'hope', that is beyond a specific hope. Hope that is Hope!



*Nicole Rotaru is a member of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and of Papua New Guinea.*