

FESTSCHRIFT IN HONOUR OF FATHER JOSSE VAN DER REST ON THE OCCASION OF HIS CENTENARY CELEBRATION

TAMBU Mba', PhD, PMP
CEPROCUL, Yaounde, Cameroon
+237 677969505; ceprocul20@gmail.com

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An Angel is born

Father Josse van der Rest was founder of SELAVIP Foundation, a major partner of CEPROCUL since 2009. Fr Josse van der Rest was a Jesuit born in Belgium but lived in Chile since 1958 until his demise on July 24, 2020 at the age of 96. For close to a century, Fr Josse challenged us with his passionate revolutionary ideas on the housing hurdles of underprivileged urban dwellers across continents. He was concerned that underprivileged families were not only socially excluded from the cities, but were also denied access to land to build their own shelter.

He was not happy vulnerable families were deprived of land on which they could, little by little, build their own houses with their scarce resources. According to him, long-term outreaches were not as important as short-term solutions. He wanted SELAVIP, CEPROCUL and other partners to recognize the urgent need of shelter for the needy. He decried the fact that urban poor families patching up in the homes of their relatives or friends sometimes didn't have any privacy of their own or were subjected to "conditions of extreme insecurity and unhealthiness". This explains why for him, it was preferable to own a "bad house now than a nice house in 10 more years" when it could be "too late to preserve [the survival of] that family".

Indeed, Father Josse van der Rest's ideas inspired the work of CEPROCUL like other partner organizations. SELAVIP has over the years shared his ideas "with partners and groups in the countries where they work, with students, and academics and in international events". One of the tangible results of this intercontinental or transatlantic collaboration has been CEPROCUL's implementation of 11 'sheltation' (shelter and sanitation) projects with SELAVIP Foundation including:

- "Transforming Lives" in 2009;
- "Sustainable Housing to Alleviate Poverty" in 2012;
- "Assisting Communities, Saving Lives" in 2013;
- "Housing for Community Development" in 2014;
- "From Ghetto to City of the Future" in 2015;
- "Building Bridges across Housing Gaps" in 2016;
- "Housing for Environmental Valorisation" in 2017;
- "From House to Home: A Dream Come True" in 2018;

- “Home at Last” in 2019;
- “Crossing the Sheltation Gap” in 2021; and
- “Sheltation for Inclusive Social Change” in 2023.

In addition to these sheltation projects directly impacting some 426 vulnerable families and households across several poor communities in Cameroon from 2009 to 2023, CEPROCUL’s hosting and organization of SELAVIP’s international conference in August 2013 on the theme **“Cities, Poverty and Slums in the Developing World – Lessons Learned by SELAVIP”** in collaboration with the Faculty of Arts, Letters and Social Sciences of the University of Yaounde I, was a commendable opportunity for stocktaking, experience sharing and road mapping. Indeed, this conference was organized in the spirit of Fr Josse’s permanent openness “to new concepts and learning from experience mostly from the poor”.

The Father Josse van der Rest-CEPROCUL Connection:

We at CEPROCUL met with Father Josse van der Rest for the first and only time in the 2007-2008 project season when he, accompanied by other SELAVIP officials, came visiting SELAVIP projects in Yaounde. It was a fatherly, caring, reassuring, soft-spoken, and ready-to-help Father Josse who received us during his conference and his post-conference discussions at the campus of the Catholic University of Central Africa. We still have vivid memories of his event at this university.

- « Nous devons promouvoir une solidarité urbaine pour créer des villes qui incluent réellement les pauvres » (Fr Josse van der Rest S.J.).
- « 4 planches aujourd’hui sont mieux qu’une bonne maison dans 5 ans ... » (Fr Josse van der Rest S.J.).
- “The problem is not the house, but the land. With a piece of land the poor man is able to build his home” (Fr Josse van der Rest S.J.).

These are some of his striking motivating citations. His invaluable pieces of advice to CEPROCUL and other participants, his vision he shared with us, his indefatigable love for the needy urban poor he shared with us, and his passion for service to the poor have since been inspirational for us at CEPROCUL. Undeniably, this inspiration was primordially accountable for the transformation of CEPROCUL from CENTER FOR THE PROMOTION OF CULTURE (rooting of Human rights, the culture of peace, Democracy, women empowerment, etc. in culture) to ACTION FOR THE NEEDY – a transformation that deeply foraged our action in humanitarianism and

community development (Shelter, WASH, Livelihood, social entrepreneurship, etc). Our gamut of projects with SELAVIP INTERNATIONAL since 2009 is a vivid demonstration of a successful transformation and collaboration.

Even more, other SELAVIP officials who came visiting projects with CEPROCUL have done so in the footsteps of Father Josse. They have also strongly built-on or reshaped his foundational strides as well as greatly enhanced the quality of our project deliverables. Thanks to Fr Josse's maiden trip to Cameroon, the monitoring and evaluation field trips of Prof Joan MacDonald (then President of SELAVIP) and Mr Juan Miquel (then SELAVIP Project Coordinator for Africa) both in 2013, Mr Charles Nolet (former SELAVIP Representative for CMR and DRC) twice in 2014 and 2015, Mr Jorge Said Maldonado (a Documentary Journalist of international notoriety) in 2018 as well as Mrs Ethel Leemans (Development Manager at SELAVIP INTERNATIONAL) in 2023, have, beyond boosting the SELAVIP-CEPROCUL ties, the quality of CEPROCUL deliverables and performance, scaled up CEPROCUL visibility enormously.

Father Josse van der Rest is the man to whom we pay tribute today. This is the icon whose vision we have shared in our work all these years. This is the figure we lost to the ugly hands of death in July 2020. His journey on to the land of Glory is a big loss not only to SELAVIP INTERNATIONAL but to CEPROCUL and other friends of SELAVIP as well.

Father Josse van der Rest S.J. shall forever remain engraved in our work.

May God receive him and **MAKE HIM AN ANGEL** in the service of His suffering humanity.

May his soul rest in perfect peace.

Adieu adieu, Father Josse van der Rest. ADIEU.....

(Written with excerpts and images from SELAVIP Foundation website)