

January 2006

RESPONSE

The newsletter for Merlin supporters

Special Report

TSUNAMI: ONE YEAR ON



EARTHQUAKE EMERGENCY

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medical relief, lasting health care



As we were preparing a Special Report for this newsletter on Merlin's response to last year's tsunami, we had to suddenly mobilise our teams to help in yet another natural disaster. This time an earthquake in Kashmir, which killed more than 70,000 people. Our medical teams are there now, helping people to survive a desperate winter.

Throughout my first year at Merlin, I have been inspired to see how quickly and effectively we can respond to natural disasters. This means not only reacting to emergency needs, but also rebuilding health systems which will last long after the crisis has subsided. In Sri Lanka for example, I worked with our team helping to ensure that ruined hospitals and health centres are being replaced by facilities that will provide much better care for survivors of the tsunami.

None of this work would be possible without the generosity of our loyal supporters. On behalf of all those who Merlin has reached at times of need, I would like to thank you for your continued help.

Carolyn Miller Carolyn Miller, Chief Executive

EARTHQUAKE EMERGENCY

A week at Merlin's field hospital in Kashmir

As Abdul Rasheed cradled his son at the improvised helipad in Panjkot, he couldn't tell the seriousness of the boy's condition. Five year-old Saheed had escaped from the wreckage of his house when the earthquake struck in the morning of October 8. Now he lay listless and in pain. Saheed's left ear was torn in half and a crush wound at the back of his head was badly infected. His mother had died

when their family house collapsed and slid down the mountainside.

At the helipad, Dr Fayaz Ahmad examined the child. "Infections to that part of the head are life threatening," he explained. "They can spread to the brain and overcome a patient in 24 hours."

Merlin's field hospital at Panj Kot



Saheed was one of seven villagers evacuated from Panjkot that day and flown to hospital in Islamabad. Dr Ahmad had arrived there to prepare the ground for a field hospital. The facility was urgently needed to treat hundreds of people in the remote Himalayan valley that had been cut off by landslides for almost two weeks.

Three days later a second helicopter brought in tents, more medical equipment, and a team of doctors and nurses. "We haven't even had time to set up all the tents because of the numbers of casualties arriving", said Richard Villar, a surgeon from Cambridge who had taken leave from his job to join Merlin's team. "They are being carried down from the mountain in their beds".



Merlin's Dr Richard Villar

Among those brought in on the first day was 12 year-old Muktiar Ehmadi who was crushed when the high school collapsed, killing 25 of his classmates. A deep wound on his elbow was cleaned and dressed by Dr David Wilson, another member of the team from the UK. Muktiar also had a dislocated hip that had damaged his sciatic nerve. He was put on a priority list for evacuation on the next helicopter.



12 year old Muktiar Ahmad was airlifted to safety

Five-year-old Imran Younis and Irshad Bashir, eight, had bad head wounds, but once cleaned and bandaged, their recovery was supervised at the field hospital.

The Merlin team worked throughout the day, making the most of the equipment they had until more supplies could be airlifted in. In the first four days of operation, the hospital treated more than 350 patients and evacuated 27 of the most serious cases. By that time, a second tented hospital was being set up to help people in the neighbouring Neelum

Merlin's earthquake response October – November 05

- ⊕ Medical staff – 24
- ⊕ Medical equipment – 4 tonnes
- ⊕ Dispensary tents – 16
- ⊕ Hospital beds – 52
- ⊕ Blankets – 46 bales
- ⊕ Energy biscuits – 6.5 tonnes
- ⊕ Rain covers – 2,500



Hassein Bibi, carried by her father, waits for attention

Valley, close to the epicentre of the earthquake. "The trauma care centres are our first response to this terrible disaster," said Sarwat Al-Attas, Merlin's medical co-ordinator in Panjkot. "Our camps will remain here for at least three months to care for the thousands of sick and injured now living in tents and makeshift shelters. People in this valley are preparing for a hard winter and Merlin will stay here with them."

As the team began their second week of operation, Saheed and his father were resting in the safety of the Islamabad Children's Hospital. "Saheed is much more alert now and his pain has gone," said Abdul Rasheed. "Our home is destroyed, but I want to go back to Panjkot as soon as he is ready. We must start to rebuild."

Saheed with his father after their evacuation to Islamabad



▶ Special report

TSUNAMI: one year on

When the tsunami swept across the Indian Ocean on Boxing Day last year, it devastated the lives of millions of people from Indonesia to the coast of Africa. As the world watched the tragedy unfold on TV, Merlin began its biggest ever emergency operation. One year on, our teams are working in Sri Lanka and Indonesia to rebuild hospitals and health centres, to provide medical care for those made homeless and to replace the skills and knowledge that were lost when thousands of health workers were overcome by the tsunami. All this has been achieved thanks to Merlin's supporters, especially those who helped us through the Daily Telegraph Christmas Appeal and the Disasters Emergency Committee.

▶ Sri Lanka

Rebuilding hospitals destroyed by the waves

The old Ninthavur district hospital, located near the beach in Kalmunai, was completely destroyed by the tsunami. Two elderly patients and one child were killed, but miraculously all the other patients and staff survived.

Merlin saw this as one of several health facilities which needed to be re-established as quickly as possible. Following consultations with local health officials, a section of a nearby school was designated as a temporary hospital.

"We divided the compound into two so that the school and the hospital could be totally independent," explains Mohamed Mowjood, Merlin's construction engineer. "Then we repaired the classrooms and outhouses, and turned them into wards, doctors' rooms, a drugs store and a laboratory.



Rachael Cummings

Merlin's Training coordinator in Aceh

"It was a priority from the start to ensure people had access to basic health care. Merlin's construction of temporary clinics and provision of equipment have made a big difference."

What Merlin has achieved in Sri Lanka

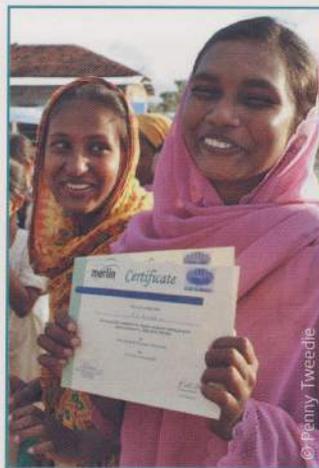
- ▶ Distributed 15,000 hygiene kits
- ▶ Trained 500 hygiene promotion volunteers
- ▶ Distributed 3,000 kits for new mothers

"Patients had to be housed in tents for six weeks before they could be moved into the new wards and it took three months for Merlin to put everything right."

Now, on an average day, the hospital sees more than 100 patients. A specialist clinic is held each day, for example, for pregnant women or patients with high blood pressure, in addition to scores of routine outpatient consultations.

The new hospital is clean and well-equipped, and will serve the needs of the local population until a permanent facility can be rebuilt.

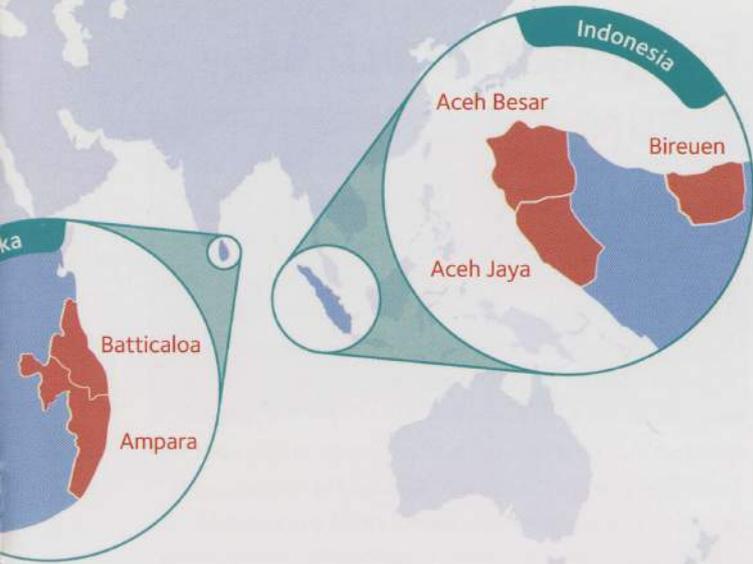
Keeping disease at bay in camps



Saheena Jesmeen is a key member of Merlin's team in Kalmunai - one of the worst hit areas on the east coast. Saheena lost 19 relatives and her house in the tragedy. Within weeks, she had joined Merlin's team, helping to train volunteers in hygiene promotion. Thousands of people have been living in makeshift camps which

are overcrowded and mosquito-ridden. In these difficult conditions, maintaining standards of personal hygiene and cleanliness are paramount if people are to stay healthy.

Merlin has been helping to prevent disease outbreaks in camps by distributing more than 10,000 hygiene kits, organising clean-up drives and poster campaigns, and providing camp cleaning equipment for 104 sites. Saheena and the other trainers have taught more than 500 volunteers how to promote good hygiene practices. On follow-up visits, Merlin has found that the camps'



What Merlin has achieved in Indonesia

- ⊕ Renovated 30 health facilities
- ⊕ Provided clean water for 4,000 people
- ⊕ Distributed 13,000 mosquito nets

Vital training for nurses



In Aceh, the health system has suffered years of under-investment. Most health professionals have had no follow-up training since they qualified, so Merlin – in partnership with the Indonesia National Nurses Association – has developed a comprehensive training programme for 120 nurses. The course covers topics including immunisation, environmental health and mental trauma.

Nurse Muliana, 30, explains why her new skills are so desperately needed in the camp where she works. “Water and sanitation are very poor and rooms are small, so there are lots of diarrhoea cases.” Rosnidawati, 33, based in a rural health centre, explains that both theory and field work were useful. “This is the first formal training I have had in community health; I am desperately needed there.” Since completing the two-month course, Muliana, Rosnidawati and their colleagues have been evaluated and monitored by Merlin. Another course is planned in Calang on Aceh’s west coast, one of the areas worst hit by the tsunami.

conditions have improved significantly. Team members were so encouraged by the results that they designed a health education training course for school teachers and pupils. “Children are the future of our country,” says Shameer Mohamed Saali, Merlin’s hygiene promotion supervisor. “It is important for them to become messengers for healthier living.”

▶ Indonesia Restoring day-to-day health care

Rosmani waits with her daughter outside the newly restored health centre at Jeunieb in Indonesia. The building was flooded during the tsunami, and in its dilapidated state, had to cater for hundreds of extra people who settled in the area after they were made homeless by the disaster. Merlin completed renovating and re-equipping the health centre in September, at a cost of around £2,000, which included the provision of furniture, baby scales, stethoscopes and mosquito nets. Jeunieb is one of around 30 clinics and health centres that Merlin has rebuilt or renovated in Indonesia.

Many health centres like this one in Aceh Province were destroyed

Rosmani waits with her daughter at the newly restored Jeunieb clinic



Basic knowledge saves lives



Fatima Abdul Quam, a newly trained health worker in Afghanistan

Fatima Abdul Quam is among more than 250 community health workers trained by Merlin in Takhar province, Afghanistan.

Traditionally, women are culturally restricted from visiting male doctors or nurses, so trained females like Fatima are crucial to the health care system. Many people seek her help because the nearest health facility is six kilometres away by foot or donkey.

The training programme, funded by the US Agency for International Development, has enabled Fatima to deal with common health issues, including malaria, fever, acute respiratory infections, diarrhoea and family planning.

Fatima describes how a young mother came to her recently in a state of desperation. Her six-month-old baby was in a critical condition, with diarrhoea and severe dehydration, yet her husband had not allowed her to go to the male doctor in the nearest clinic.

"I identified the danger signs and immediately knew what to do," explains Fatima. "Throughout the night, I gave the child oral rehydration salts – a simple and effective treatment that could save thousands of lives every year if more people knew about it." By the morning, the baby's condition had improved dramatically. Fatima showed the mother how to prepare oral rehydration salts for the future. A few days later, the child's entire family turned up at Fatima's home to express their gratitude for saving the baby's life.

Forging a healthier future in Gaza

Merlin has helped to re-establish a child nutrition clinic in the Palestinian territory of Gaza. The Ard El Insan clinic stood on the edge of a security zone separating an Israeli settlement from the city of Khan Younis. In early 2005, fighting between Israelis and Palestinians became so intense that staff were forced to evacuate and to move into smaller premises further into the city. But a peace initiative in August resulted in Israeli troops pulling out from Gaza. The easing of tension meant that the clinic was able to return to its original site. Merlin helped by installing a powerful generator, which will keep the site running during Gaza's frequent electricity cuts.



This child nutrition clinic is fully operational after a recent peace deal

According to the United Nations, a quarter of the population of Gaza are living in poverty. Ayed Elberi, director of the clinic, believes that 40 per cent of children in Khan Younis are malnourished. In the past year, his staff have seen more than 2,800 cases.

The Ard El Insan clinic is equipped to do its own blood analysis and provides vitamins, mineral supplements and high energy food for malnourished children. It also runs health education classes for mothers including cooking lessons to help them prepare more nutritious meals.



Abeer Samara's 18-month-old daughter Moham suffered from severe anaemia. After three months of care at the Ard El Insan clinic, Moham's blood level is almost back to normal.

A survivor's story



Crossfire victim Irene Smith

Two years ago, Irene Smith was caught up in crossfire when fighting erupted between government and rebel forces in the Liberian town of Buchanan. As she ran for shelter, Irene was struck in the back by a stray bullet, leaving her paralysed.

Irene was initially taken to a local clinic that was barely functioning. Three months later, as peace was returning, Irene was referred to a hospital in Monrovia but was treated with nothing but paracetamol. Doctors eventually sent her home, saying she would die within days.

Irene's despairing family decided to try the Liberian Government Hospital in Buchanan, which had just been re-opened by Merlin. The hospital was stripped bare by looters during the conflict, and most of the staff had fled. Merlin stepped in and quickly renovated the facility, recruited and trained staff, and supplied medicines and equipment.

Doctors discovered that Irene was pregnant but that the baby had died inside her womb, resulting in severe internal bleeding. For the next eight months, Irene was bedridden and extremely frail, but her condition slowly improved. "Irene's positive attitude and wide smile meant that she soon became extremely popular with staff. Gradually, she began to respond to medication," says Dr Philderald Pratt.

In 2005, Irene finally returned home. Merlin provided her with a wheelchair, which she uses to go to the market and to church. She returns to the hospital twice a week for treatment and painkillers and is beginning to lead a relatively normal life.

The Buchanan Hospital in Liberia



Eyewitness account: Darfur

Jacob Hughes, Merlin's Operations Manager for Africa, describes his recent visit to one of seven mobile clinic sites operated by Merlin in Darfur, Sudan.



"From Merlin's base in Nyala town, we set off on the two hour drive to Sanyafundu village, where Merlin is running a permanent clinic and mobile clinics for surrounding communities. The region is highly insecure – two weeks earlier, 17 employees of another NGO were kidnapped.

"Halfway to Sanyafundu, a massive tree came into view and I was surprised to see a crowd of over 300 women and children sitting under it, taking shade from the scorching sun. When our vehicle pulled up, I realised that this was actually one of Merlin's mobile clinic sites. Our medical team, including two doctors, two midwives, and a vaccinator were busy treating patients inside an eight-room hut built with grass mats and plastic sheeting.

"I had never seen so many people waiting for a mobile clinic. For me, this was an emotional moment – to see such overwhelming need for our services. All those hours that we put in back at the London office helped make it possible for these mobile clinics to offer life-saving care to all those people who would otherwise have had no treatment. To see it come together on such a grand scale was very moving."

Merlin's mobile clinic in Um Godjina, Darfur



▶ Thanks for our best fundraising year ever

In addition to the tsunami disaster and the South Asia earthquake, the past year has been incredibly busy for Merlin, with urgent health needs in 13 other countries including Sudan, Liberia and Afghanistan.

Your generosity and commitment has meant that Merlin was able to provide timely medical relief and vital health care to the people most in need. And thanks to our regular direct debit donors, we can plan ahead to be ready for the next time disaster strikes. On behalf of the millions of people we seek to serve, thank you for supporting Merlin.

The highest climb on earth



A group of 16 climbers aim to become the first team ever to complete the ascent from the lowest point on Earth to the highest, raising vital funds for Merlin all the way.

Departing from the Dead Sea in December 2005, the "EVERESTMAX" team will cycle through eight countries along the ancient Silk Road, and will begin their climb up Everest in April 2006.

"Our decision to support Merlin has become even more pertinent recently," explains expedition leader Dominic Faulkner. "Many countries en route have been affected by the recent natural disasters in Asia".

Going the extra mile

Former Merlin employee Emily Bell explains how she raised more than £4,500 for Merlin by running the London Marathon:



"It was an article in this newsletter that first inspired me to run the London Marathon for Merlin. I was at the London head office, awaiting a briefing before my three-month placement with Merlin in Ethiopia, when I read about another runner's experience. Before I knew it, I had signed up.

"I began training in Ethiopia – the land of runners – kitted out in the bright red, green and yellow national running tracksuit. The following months saw me running in blizzards around Lake Geneva, through olive groves in Paxos, and around London's Kennington Park.

"Having seen Merlin's essential work in Ethiopia, I could easily convince people to sponsor me. One themed party, a local newspaper article, and many emails and letters later, I had raised over £4,500. My 'Justgiving' web page made fundraising much easier, as the bulk of sponsors donated online.

"I completed the marathon in four hours and 48 minutes. For the last six miles, my body was screaming 'No!', but I persevered. At the end, I burst into tears! It was a fantastic day, and I am now planning to do it all over again!"

▶ Can you lend a hand?

We are looking for volunteers with administrative skills to join our fundraising team at Merlin's head office in London. Call Liz Graham on 0870 833 0130 to be added to our volunteers register.



Merlin is the only specialist UK charity which responds worldwide with vital health care and medical relief for vulnerable people caught up in natural disasters, conflict, disease and health system collapse.

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