

August 2006

RESPONSE

The newsletter for Merlin supporters



Health and development in Congo

- ▶ Java earthquake response
- ▶ Eyewitness account: Nepal
- ▶ Merlin supporters reach new heights

merlin
medical relief, lasting health care

From the Chief Executive

Since our last newsletter, Merlin has responded to another emergency – this time an earthquake which struck the Indonesian island of Java in May. Our existing base nearby in the tsunami-devastated region of Aceh meant that we could send a medical team to Java within 24 hours. Our swift response undoubtedly helped to save many lives.

As I write, Merlin is responding to the escalating violence in the Middle East, by sending emergency assessment teams to Lebanon and Gaza.

In this issue of Response, you can also read about our ongoing programme to rebuild health services in Democratic Republic of Congo. Having been supported by Merlin for four years, the hospital in Kindu has been transformed and is now the official provincial hospital in Maniema. We hope to be able to support it for at least three more years, to make lasting improvements to the health system.

Our work in Congo and 15 other countries would not be possible without the generosity of all our supporters. Thank you for helping to make a difference.

Carolyn Miller

Carolyn Miller, Chief Executive

Striving for health and development in Congo

By Jacob Hughes, Operations Manager, East and Central Africa

The Democratic Republic of Congo is a vast country which straddles the centre of Africa. For years, its people suffered from a brutal and corrupt dictatorship. When the regime fell ten years ago, the population endured a long-running civil war which left three and a half million dead. The effects were felt hardest in the east, where local militias and invading armies vied for control.

Merlin began working in Congo in 1997 and, over the next

few years, set up emergency programmes to help those made homeless by the war. In 2002, we started a major project to restore and re-equip a major hospital in the town of Kindu on the Congo river.

Throughout the hostilities, the hospital provided a refuge for people living in the harshest conditions – people like Alfonsine Kmpala, who fled into the forest to escape from marauding rebels. She brought her daughter Barudni to the hospital after the baby became severely malnourished and developed a blood infection.

Alfonsine Kmpala and her family fled to the forest to hide from rebels. She brought her daughter Barudni to Kindu Hospital after the baby became severely malnourished and developed a blood infection. Photo: Aubrey Wade.





Kindu Hospital has become a teaching centre for Kindu Nurses College, and helped 20 doctors gain practical experience last year. Photo: Aubrey Wade.

It's no surprise that the health statistics in eastern Congo are among the worst in the world. One in five children will not reach their fifth birthday, and a third suffer from chronic malnutrition. Each child is also likely to endure six bouts of malaria a year. In the past year alone, Merlin has responded to outbreaks of cholera and a suspected plague epidemic.

On several occasions since the start of the project, upsurges of fighting in and around Kindu have forced staff to evacuate the hospital. But each time they returned to continue the task of rebuilding the region's medical services to help more people like Alfonsine.

Today, Kindu Hospital lies at the centre of a network of more than 70 rural clinics that have been transformed by Merlin in Maniema Province. Roofs have been repaired, floors cemented and walls painted. Medical staff have been trained, and equipment such as weighing scales, stethoscopes and cold stores provided. Here, the simplest of help can save lives. There are few decent roads in the region, but providing a bicycle for a clinic means staff can collect vaccines in cold boxes and get to rural sites quickly to carry out immunisation campaigns.

Ultimately, Merlin's aim here is to build up a health service that allows each of the nearly one million people there to visit a doctor or nurse at least once a year. When we work out the cost, it comes to around £4 per person.

Today there are signs of hope in Congo and, in the run-up to the summer election, there is a growing sense of unity. Yet the population faces a huge challenge in rebuilding after years of conflict. It is Merlin's belief that people need to be healthy before their country can develop. £4 per person seems a small price to pay to help achieve this.

- ⊙ More than 3 million people have died as a result of the war in Congo
- ⊙ One in five children will not reach their fifth birthday
- ⊙ Average life expectancy is 42 for men and 47 for women

A day in the life of...

Magnus Anderson, a former NHS manager from London, who spent four months working in Congo as part of Merlin's internship programme.



I wake at around 7am and grab a quick breakfast. Today I will be joining project officer Nadia and medical officer Ferdinand on a visit to a remote health centre supported by Merlin. There are no roads outside the towns in this part of Congo. However, there are paths between villages and it is possible to use small trail bikes. It takes us more than six hours to cover 60 miles and we are pretty tired and sore by the time we arrive in Kowe, a village of about 5,000 people on the banks of the Congo river in Maniema Province.

The Merlin medics go to check on patients in the health centre. Tomorrow they will lead a ward round with the staff, undertake some informal training and check on the usage of medicine.

Meanwhile, Prince, our water and sanitation engineer, and I talk to local chiefs about local water sources. It seems people here generally take water directly from the river as there are no easily accessible local springs. This poses a major health threat – the river is used for washing and disposal of waste. Last year, there were cholera outbreaks all along the river, with almost 1,500 cases and 28 deaths. Merlin responded with treatment centres and also by chlorinating water points along the river. It is obviously a priority to help prevent future outbreaks.

It emerges that there is a large natural spring two kilometres away. Tomorrow we will investigate this and assess whether we could pipe drinking water from there to the centre of the village. We also discuss the possibility of building latrines in schools. This would not only reduce the amount of waste disposed of in the river, but would also provide an opportunity to educate children on hygiene and disease prevention.

By 7pm it's dark and, with no electricity, work stops for the day. We troop back to the huts that we are staying in and have dinner and a chat before bed.



Patients waiting to be seen at a rural clinic supported by Merlin in Maniema Province. Photo: Aubrey Wade.

Emergency response: Java earthquake

Half a dozen Indonesian medical students crowded around Dr Richard Villar on a ward at Bethesda Hospital in Yogyakarta, Java, following the earthquake that killed more than 5,000 people



An estimated 1.2 million people in Java were left homeless after the May 27 earthquake.



Dr Richard Villar examines an injured woman at Bethesda Hospital in Yogyakarta.

on May 27. As volunteers in the relief effort, the students were helping him to provide pre-surgery care for injured survivors.

Dr Villar joined Merlin's emergency response team in Indonesia five days after the disaster. The orthopaedic surgeon from London was helping hospital staff to assess patients with bone fractures and to conduct minor operations. With an estimated 30,000 people injured, every hospital or clinic in the region that had not been destroyed was overwhelmed.

Merlin was already working in Indonesia, in the tsunami-devastated province of Aceh, and was able to respond quickly by sending an emergency response team to Java a day after the quake. In the first week, the team distributed a tonne of medical supplies to clinics and hospitals, and operated two mobile clinics in the badly-affected Bantul district. In total, Merlin's mobile teams treated more than 740 patients in 39 locations.

Nurhayati, who had a fractured arm and severe abdominal pain, lay on a bed holding her husband's hand while Dr Villar examined her medical chart and reviewed the case with the students. "It was assumed that Nurhayati's severe yet inexplicable abdominal pain was appendicitis," he said. "But when we take a look at the x-ray we can see that she actually has a fractured pelvic bone."

The 30-year-old mother-of-two nodded as Dr Villar explained her diagnosis. With plenty of rest, the bones should fuse together on their own, and Nurhayati should make a full recovery, he added. Relief washed over her husband's face. "My wife and both my children were injured in the disaster, so I am really grateful that someone like Dr Villar has come to help," he said.

Restoring hospital services in Sudan

Rose Sudani arrived at Nimule Hospital in South Sudan in April after travelling 80 kilometres from her home in Magwi town. The four-year-old girl had been suffering from progressive abdominal swelling, fever and a cough for about a month. She was referred to the hospital by staff at her local clinic. It was feared the little girl had a tumour, which had to be confirmed with an ultrasound at hospital.

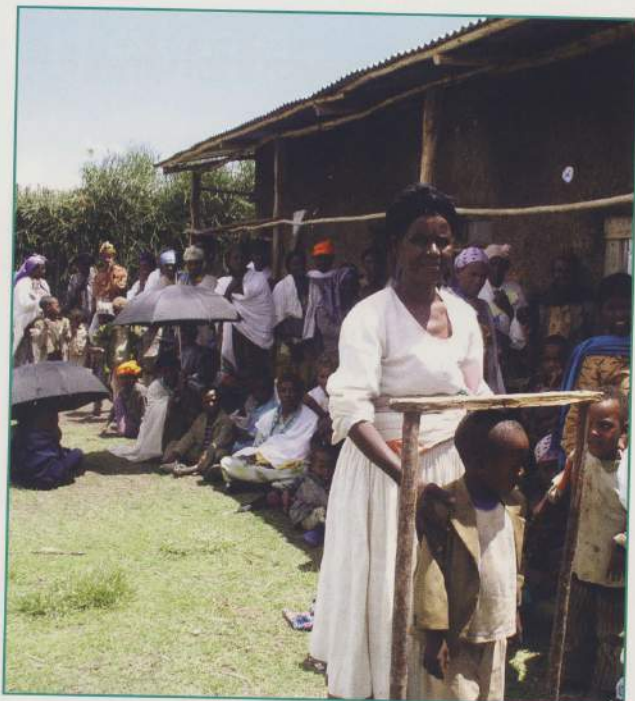
Doctors made a provisional diagnosis of either Burkitt's lymphoma or Nephroblastoma – different forms of cancer. Rose was given supportive treatment at Nimule Hospital until June, when she was referred to another hospital in Uganda for specialist treatment. "We hope to see Rose back in Nimule soon, to follow up and monitor her condition at this hospital," says nurse Rebecca Mou.

Rose is one of more than 5,000 patients seen at Nimule Hospital every month. The facility has been transformed since

Merlin began supporting it in 2004. Back then, there were fewer than 40 staff members. There were no medicines and barely any equipment, so many patients could not be treated. Merlin has renovated and equipped the whole hospital, and constructed new units including paediatric, tuberculosis and sleeping sickness wards, and a modern laboratory. The hospital now has a 160-bed capacity and more than 150 staff members who are trained, supervised and financially supported by Merlin.



Nurse Rebecca Mou (centre) checks on Rose Sudani (left) who was brought to Nimule Hospital by her mother (right). Photo: Piers Birtwistle.



Birke Bachiga, a health worker trained by Merlin, measures a child's height – part of the growth monitoring procedure to check for malnutrition.

Outreach campaign improves child health care

In Ethiopia, Merlin has recently helped to implement an outreach campaign to improve child health care across five districts of Arsi Zone. Although vaccinations and growth monitoring are available at clinics there, some families are unable to attend health facilities simply because they live too far away and cannot afford to pay for transport. This 10-day campaign aimed to cover remote villages to ensure that all children under five years of age received the essential care they needed.

Dr Birkety Mengistu, Merlin's Country Health Co-ordinator in Ethiopia, travelled to one of the sites in Dodota Sire, a district where the limited road network prevents most of the population from accessing the few health facilities in the area. More than 30 women with their children had already gathered at the site, waiting patiently in the intense heat. Birke Bachiga, a traditional birth attendant trained by Merlin, was measuring children and pregnant women to check for malnutrition. In addition, children were also given vitamin A supplements, de-worming tablets and measles vaccinations. Around 150 patients turned up that day, having been informed of the campaign through Merlin-supported outreach and community education activities.

"Only 36% of the population actually use health facilities," explains Dr Mengistu. "In addition to difficulties with getting to the clinics, many people prefer to go to traditional healers. Raising awareness of the importance of health care is one of the challenges that Merlin faces in Ethiopia."

Eyewitness account: Nepal



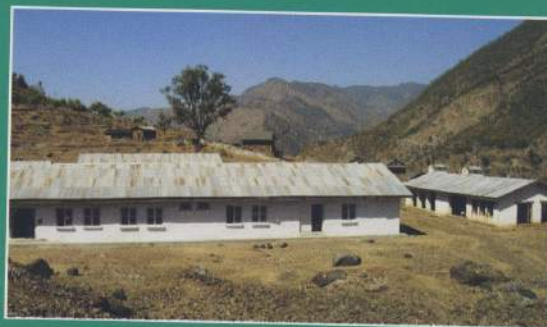
For the past decade, the Maoist insurgency in Nepal has sought to destroy the constitutional monarchy. The fighting has claimed an estimated 13,000 lives. In April, the rebels called a ceasefire, and peace talks with the government are now in progress. Dr Sean Keogh describes his assessment in Rolpa, where Merlin set up a new project earlier this year:

As a health needs assessor, it's not my job to look at the rights or wrongs of a war, but to help those caught in the crossfire. We focused on the remote, mountainous region of Rolpa – a Maoist stronghold. Local people here are frequently caught up in fighting, and health indicators are amongst the worst in Asia. Every person I met had a horror story to tell about a woman dying in labour or a child dying of a preventable illness simply because health care wasn't available.

There is a hospital in the government enclave of Liwang, Rolpa's capital of 3,000 people. But with one doctor and very few staff, it can only offer very basic health care, so our objective was to pull mother and child health care up to national standards by training local doctors and nurses.

Most people in the Maoist-controlled areas outside Liwang depend on rural clinics run by nurses who also need training. Merlin will have to perform the balancing act of staying neutral, and to seek permission from both the Nepalese army and Maoist commanders to work here. We will also have to deal with regular roadblocks, curfews and travel bans, and the fear of being caught in crossfire.

But just when I would question the feasibility of the project, I would talk to a nurse desperately keen for training, or a mother who had lost her child. There really was no question that we were going to make this project happen.



Liwang Hospital in Rolpa district of Nepal, where Merlin set up a new project earlier this year.



Two EVERESTMAX team members during the ascent.

Reaching new heights

Three people have become the first to complete the world's longest ascent of 9,300 metres, from the shores of the Dead Sea to the summit of Mount Everest, while raising funds for Merlin.

The first phase of the EVERESTMAX expedition, which began in December 2005, involved cycling across eight different countries at an average pace of 100 kilometres a day.

In February, the cyclists passed through the Iranian city of Bam, which had been devastated by an earthquake in 2003. The team paid a special visit to one of the 43 health facilities that Merlin helped to renovate or rebuild after the disaster.

"We have been privileged to see the work of Merlin and other charities within the city and are glad to support them," said team member Dickie Walters.

The cyclists reached Everest Base Camp in April and were joined by other EVERESTMAX team members as they began the 3,700 metre ascent. Nine of the 16 climbers made it to the summit.

Expedition leader Dominic Faulkner, one of the three who completed the entire challenge, said: "We've had an enormously successful trip and succeeded in our aim of being the first to go from the lowest to the highest points on Earth!"

The team hope to raise £15,000 for Merlin and are still seeking sponsors. For more information, visit www.everestmax.com.

Cycling through Iran during the first phase of the expedition.

Merlin needs your shares!

Have you had the good fortune to find out you are the owner of shares that you never bought? Perhaps a building society which decided to become a public limited company gave you shares for being a customer?

Have you been given shares by family members, and don't really know what to do with them? Or maybe you've tried to sell your small amounts of shares, but realised it would cost more in broker's fees than any return you would get?

Whether you have one or a thousand shares, Merlin can make use of them. All you have to do is get in contact with us and be willing to donate your shares.

If you have a few shares to give, then using ShareGift (www.ShareGift.com) may be a good idea. ShareGift collects any unwanted shares; once they have enough of one company's shares, they sell them and donate money to charities nominated by those who have given the shares.

This year we have already received £5,000 through ShareGift. If you – as a Merlin supporter – are happy to give your shares and nominate Merlin as your benefiting charity, we could be receiving a lot more money in the future.

If you have a larger number of shares or would prefer to donate your shares directly to Merlin, we would be delighted to hear from you. Giving shares as part of your charitable donation has other benefits; you can claim tax relief on the value of most shares donated and we can sell the shares, enabling Merlin to help even more people in need.

For more information, please contact Andrea Miles by emailing andrea.miles@merlin.org.uk or calling 020 7014 1705.

Kilimanjaro challenge

This is your last chance to take part in the challenge of a lifetime – climbing Mount Kilimanjaro while raising funds for Merlin. We are inviting you, your friends and/or colleagues to join a Merlin expedition from June 15–24, 2007. **For more information, visit www.merlin.org.uk or contact Gayle Woodstock on 020 7014 1707 or gayle.woodstock@merlin.org.uk.**



A dream come true

Nikki Casey, a nurse at Papworth Hospital, Cambridgeshire, was among 28 runners who took part in this year's London Marathon to raise funds for Merlin. Looking back, the mother-of-two explains why she took on the challenge:

As a teenager watching the marathon on television, I longed to take part, but it seemed impossible because I was asthmatic. Now, thanks to a dairy/gluten-free diet, my asthma has improved massively. Two years ago I ran a five kilometre race, and accomplishing the marathon this year was a dream come true!

I chose Merlin because I wanted to support a charity whose work I admired. I grew up in developing countries because my father was involved in aid work, so I'm especially aware of the limited medical facilities in such places. Merlin has recently been helping survivors of the earthquake in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. I lived there as a child so my sponsorship money felt very personal and worthwhile.

I trained alone and it was difficult at times to stay motivated during the winter. But in February, I was in Vancouver, Canada, where I enjoyed some wonderful runs in the sunshine by the sea, looking at snow-capped mountains – truly inspirational! Fundraising was another challenge, yet even strangers were incredibly generous, and I soon reached my target of £1,500.

Marathon Day was grey and wet – perfect for running. At mile 24, the urge to stop was overwhelming, but stubborn determination



Nikki Casey celebrates with her daughter, Isobel, after completing the London Marathon.

kept me going. I ached the next day but it was my biggest accomplishment to date and worth every second of pain. Within days my "never again" resolve was wavering. I would love to do it again and faster than the 4 hours 37 minutes I achieved this time!

To apply for a place in the 2007 London Marathon, email marathon@merlin.org.uk or call 020 7014 1600.

Merlin 2006 Christmas Cards



To order your Christmas cards, please complete the order form below and send with payment to:

Merlin, 12th Floor, 207 Old Street, London, EC1V 9NR or fax to 020 7014 1601.

Card Selection & Postage

(Each pack of cards has 10 cards)

Snowflake Tree @ £3.99 per pack

Sprouts @ £3.25 per pack

Old Curiosity Shop / A Child is Born @ £3.50 per pack

Postage and Packaging (UK only): £1.99 for 1st pack and £0.75 for each additional pack. If you place an order of more than 15 packs, we'll invoice you for the postage and packaging costs.

No. of Packs

TOTAL

Amount

 £

 £

 £

 £

Payment Details

Cheque ☐ Visa/Delta ☐ Mastercard ☐

Name on card: _____

Card Number: _____

Expiry Date: ____/____/____ Date: _____

Signature: _____

Please make cheques payable to 'Merlin'

Delivery Address

Name: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____

Telephone (daytime): _____

Lifeline

April – June 2006

Merlin's programmes are funded by a wide range of government agencies, UN departments, trusts and foundations, corporate partners and individual supporters. During the period April – June 2006, these grants and donations supported more than 60 different projects in 16 countries. This overview describes Merlin's key ongoing activities and major new projects confirmed during this period.

AFGHANISTAN:

In April, 21 midwives graduated from an 18-month midwife training course funded by USAID, with skills that will benefit 168,000 women of child-bearing age in Takhar Province. Students are now being selected for the next course. Meanwhile, USAID continues to fund Merlin's programme in Badakhshan province, supporting 14 rural clinics and training health workers. Additional funding for medical equipment was provided by The Lindbury Trust.



DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO:

DFID has recently extended its support to Kindu Hospital and surrounding health centres in Maniema Province, benefiting approximately one million people. Meanwhile, JOA, OCHA and DFID are supporting water and sanitation programmes to provide 75 wells and springs, 34 rainwater catchment tanks and 221 latrines in Maniema and North Kivu provinces.

ETHIOPIA:

OCHA and Man Group plc are funding a new six-month programme that will establish two mobile clinics, and support four static clinics, in the Somali region, where drought and conflict has limited access to essential health care. An 18-month programme funded by The Band Aid Trust to build 1,000 latrines in the Dodota Sire, Oromiya region, has now been completed.

GEORGIA:

Rehabilitation of 15 clinics in Kakheti has begun as part of a two-year EU-funded programme to renovate and equip up to

57 clinics. Meanwhile, the combined population of 724,000 in Kakheti and Shida Kartli regions continues to benefit from a tuberculosis management programme funded by JOA.

INDONESIA:

Man Group plc and Daily Telegraph Appeal funds enabled Merlin to swiftly establish two emergency mobile clinics after the May 27 earthquake in Java, treating more than 700 survivors in the Bantul region. Daily Telegraph Appeal funds have also been used to train 120 midwives in the tsunami-affected Aceh province.

IVORY COAST:

The EU is funding an 11-month programme to renovate 21 health facilities and schools in Bouake and Korhogo, and part of Korhogo Regional Hospital, benefiting a catchment population of 1.7 million people.

KENYA:

The scope of emergency feeding programmes supported by DFID and UNICEF in drought-affected Wajir and Turkana Districts has increased from 13 to 20 divisions, to reach a total population of 109,000 children. Meanwhile CHF, Rockefeller Foundation and Futures Group Europe continue to fund HIV prevention programmes in Turkana District and in Nyanza Province.

LIBERIA:

Irish Aid is funding a new programme of support to eight clinics and two HIV testing and counselling centres in Montserrado, that will serve a population of 137,000. Meanwhile DFID and ECHO continue to support hospitals in Harper and Buchanan respectively, serving a combined catchment population of 746,000. In addition, The Aqualung Trust has funded an ambulance for Maryland County.

MYANMAR:

DEC and Daily Telegraph Appeal funds have helped to train and equip 72 village health workers who will serve a population of 36,000 people in Laputta. Both donors are funding 73 water and sanitation projects, to provide rainwater collection tanks and latrines in schools and clinics throughout the region.

Lifeline

April – June 2006

NEPAL:

Merlin has started a new nine-month programme funded by ECHO, to strengthen primary health care services in areas affected by conflict, with an emphasis on mother and child health care.

PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES:

Over the next 12 months, two mobile health teams funded by ECHO are expected to be operating in the West Bank, to bring essential health care to a population of 106,262 people in Qalqilya and Salfit districts. Meanwhile, 61,641 people in the West Bank have been helped through a 10-month programme funded by ECHO, through the support of 17 clinics, health worker training and ambulance services.

PAKISTAN:

In April and May, ECHO, DEC and DFID funded refresher training and equipment for 590 female health workers as part of a nine-month programme to re-activate health care in the earthquake-devastated Lower Neelum Valley. In the same region, 100,000 people benefited from five field clinics and mobile outreach services funded by the same donors.

SOMALIA:

Phase two of the three-year Global Fund/UNICEF-sponsored malaria control programme has begun. Merlin's technical expertise is helping Somalian authorities to develop a disease management strategy that benefits the 2.4 million population of Puntland.

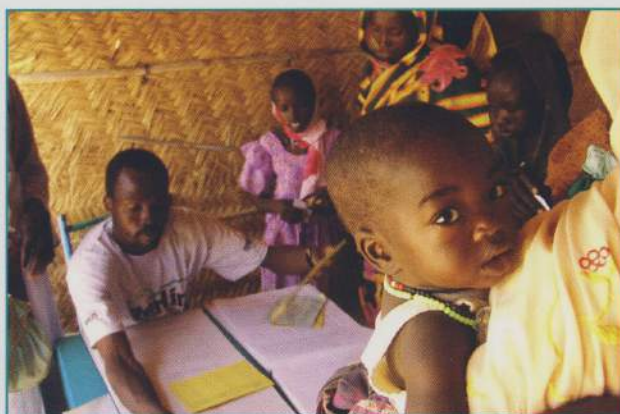
SRI LANKA:

In May, Merlin set up an emergency mobile clinic to help 2,700 families affected by conflict in Trincomalee District. Meanwhile,

DEC and Daily Telegraph Appeal funds have enabled Merlin to start a health and hygiene promotion programme, which includes five mobile dental clinics, for children in 140 schools.

SUDAN:

In Darfur, a new programme funded by ECHO and CHF has started in Gereida where two mobile clinics will provide health care for 90,000 people affected by the conflict. The AquaLung Trust is funding the construction of a new clinic in Hijer in South Darfur. In South Sudan, 250,000 people in Eastern Equatoria are expected to benefit from a new three-year programme of supporting health services and constructing clinics, funded by the EU.



TAJIKISTAN:

CIDA, ECHO, IOM and the Japanese Embassy in Tajikistan are funding an ongoing infectious disease control programme in Khatlon and Rasht Valley Provinces, which has helped 135,000 people access medical care. More than 270,000 people in Rasht Valley are also being helped to manage disease outbreaks and natural disasters.

On behalf of the beneficiaries of our programmes, we would like to thank all those who have supported our work. Unfortunately, due to limited space, not all of our donors can be listed.

The AquaLung Trust
The Band Aid Trust
CHF
CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency)
Daily Telegraph Appeal
DEC (Disasters Emergency Committee)
DFID (UK's Department for International Development)
ECHO (European Commission's Humanitarian Office)
EU (European Union)

Futures Group Europe
Global Fund
IOM (International Organisation for Migration)
Irish Aid
Japanese Embassy in Tajikistan
JOA (Jersey Overseas Aid)
The Lindbury Trust
Man Group plc
OCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs)
Rockefeller Foundation
UNDP (United Nations Development Programme)
UNICEF
USAID (United States Agency for International Development)

Merlin 2006 Christmas Cards

Why not send Merlin cards to your family and friends this Christmas? To order, please fill in the form overleaf and return it to us by post or fax.



Snowflake Tree

119 x 113mm

10 cards with envelopes for **£3.99**

Greeting inside these cards reads:

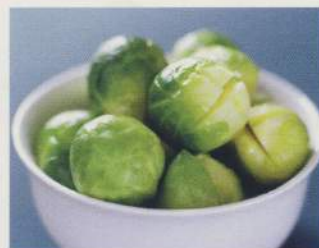
With Best Wishes for Christmas and the New Year

Sprouts

98 x 130mm

10 cards with envelopes for **£3.25**

Cards have been left blank for your own greeting



SEASON'S
GREETINGS



Old Curiosity Shop / A Child is Born

130 x 98mm

10 cards with envelopes for **£3.50**

(5 cards each of 2 designs)

Greeting inside these cards reads:

WITH BEST WISHES FOR CHRISTMAS
AND THE NEW YEAR

Cover image:

These children came with their family to the Um Gonia refugee camp in the Darfur region of Sudan, after their village was destroyed during the conflict. A Merlin mobile clinic provides the only medical care for thousands of people in the camp.



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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Registered charity number: 1016607