

# Frontline

The newsletter for Merlin supporters May 2013



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## Syria – the crisis we can't ignore

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Photo: © Reuters/Ahmed Jadallah

**MEDICAL EXPERTS ON THE FRONTLINE**

[www.merlin.org.uk/frontline/May2013](http://www.merlin.org.uk/frontline/May2013)

Registered charity 1135111



# Syria: the crisis we can't ignore

**As the fighting continues and the crisis deepens, Merlin is working to bring hope and save lives**

Photo: © Reuters/Mohamed Azakir



Dr Qasim fights to save a dying Syrian child's life.

There are some crises you can't ignore, however difficult and dangerous it may be to get involved. That's why Merlin isn't standing by as the crisis in Syria worsens.

The catastrophic civil war in Syria has raged for over two years now, and it continues to worsen as the fighting between government and opposition forces grows more intense.

Over one million people have now fled the country, half of whom are children. But there are a further four million people – including the elderly, the sick and a great many families with young children – who have been driven from their homes and have been sleeping rough.

## **A growing health crisis**

The war has created a huge health crisis. Over half the country's hospitals have been damaged because of fighting. Doctors have



According to the UN, at least 70,000 people have been killed in the Syrian conflict so far and over one million people have now fled the country.

←  Syria

been killed in the conflict and others have been forced to flee the country. And 78% of ambulances have been damaged.

Meanwhile the remaining health providers are struggling to cope, especially in areas where thousands of displaced people have come in search of safety. One rural clinic, which supported 50 patients at the start of 2011, is now responsible for the health of 12,000 people.

Conditions like diarrhoea, typhoid, hepatitis A, respiratory infections and skin diseases are spreading dramatically. Women are delivering babies in basements and abandoned buildings. And as Linda Doull, who oversees our emergency response team, reports, the problems ahead may be even bigger. "We have yet to see the full impact," she says. "For example, malnutrition is likely to rise in the coming weeks and months."





Photo: © Reuters/Ahmed Jadallah

Syrian refugee children queue as they wait to receive aid from humanitarian agencies at Bab al-Salam refugee camp in Syria near the Turkish border.

***“What began as a crisis is now a full-blown humanitarian disaster. Millions of innocent lives are at stake.”***

### **Relieving suffering**

Against this background, Merlin has to do all we can to relieve suffering and save lives. You have responded so generously to our emergency appeal for funds – thank you.

As you know, our focus will always be to deliver the best health care possible to the people that need it most. Our efforts are aimed at helping the people in the greatest need, without any regard to their political allegiance.

We wish we could give you more details of exactly where we are working and what we are doing, but if we did so, we would risk putting our own staff and the people we are working with in danger.

### **A ray of hope in terrible times**

In the words of our Chief Executive Carolyn Miller: “What began as a crisis is now a

full-blown humanitarian disaster. Millions of innocent lives are at stake.” And as the crisis deepens, there is much more to do. In particular, we need more medical equipment, drugs and other medical supplies to help the sick and the injured.

It won't be easy, because Syria in the throes of a bitter civil war is an incredibly dangerous place. But with your support we know we can bring a ray of hope to people who are living through terrible times. More important still, we can save the lives of many thousands of people who, without our help, simply wouldn't survive this war.



### **Want to know more?**

Please go to our website for more in-depth information on this situation:

**[www.merlin.org.uk](http://www.merlin.org.uk)**



Photo: Glenna Gordon

# A worldwide force for health – thanks to you

It's an incredible thought that, thanks to you, 12 people are treated by Merlin every minute of every day. Last year, we treated 6.5 million people and provided 12.5 million people with access to primary health services. But what's even more impressive is that this has been achieved by a charity – and by people like you who fund our work through your generous donations.

And if you have ever questioned whether your support really makes a difference, we hope this edition of *Frontline* will give you the answer – because it shows what a lasting impact your donations can make.

**Our Promise.**  
On average, 96p of every  
£1 spent goes directly to  
our field operations.

## **The life-saving work that goes on spreading**

Merlin's work isn't about arriving at the scene of an emergency, delivering short-term aid in the glare of the world's cameras and then leaving again. It's about staying to help people recover from a crisis – as we have continued to do in Haiti. It is about making the long-term changes that will help generations of people to improve their lives – such as equipping health centres and training health workers.

**That's why Merlin's work is like a pebble dropped in a stream. The ripples go on spreading. Every clinic we help to equip will provide health care for more people every day.**

Every midwife we train will help hundreds of mothers to deliver their babies safely in the course of her working life. Every child we vaccinate against potentially deadly diseases like measles will grow up to understand the importance of vaccination for his or her own children.

**That is how you are helping Merlin to be a worldwide force for health.**



# Feeding baby Bashir

**Bashir is typical of many thousands of children in Yemen. At just seven-months old, he is dangerously malnourished.**

Fearing his baby boy would die, Bashir's father Mohammad set out on his motorbike to the nearest Merlin clinic. There we gave him a month's supply of Plumpy'Nut®, a high-protein food supplement which is a highly effective treatment for malnutrition in young children.

Now, after a few weeks of treatment, Bashir is starting to put on weight. "Bashir is improving, thanks to Merlin," says Mohammad. But he adds sadly: "It would be good if there were health services nearer to my house, because there are lots of malnourished children in my village."

*"The people need us. We will not turn our backs on them."*

## Feeding and caring

Yemen is in the grip of a food crisis which means that around 43 per cent of children under five are malnourished. But that's something Merlin is working hard to change.

We have set up feeding programmes in the worst affected parts of the country, to screen children for malnutrition and give them the nourishment they need. We are also setting up outreach clinics in remote communities like Bashir's village and providing post and antenatal care to expecting and new mothers.

Merlin's Regional Head for Asia, Gabor Beszterczey, says, "Yemen is incredibly difficult to work in at the present time. The people need us, though. We will not turn our backs on them."

**We are so grateful to supporters like you for helping us save the lives of children like Bashir. Please help us continue with this life-saving work by giving as generously as you can.**



Mohammad Hassan Ali with his baby son Bashir.

**43%**  
43% of children under five are malnourished.

**60%**  
60% of children are now stunted.

**3,569**  
Since 2012 Merlin have successfully treated 3,569 people including 1,473 children with serious health problems.



# Merlin's midwives inspire us all

Photo: Jenny Matthews



Qutbia, a Merlin trained midwife, examines Sima, nine months pregnant in Farkhar district hospital, Afghanistan.

## We want many more expectant mothers to be properly cared for – and you're helping us make it happen

International Day of the Midwife, which takes place on May 5 every year, is a celebration of the vital role midwives play in keeping mothers and babies healthy. But for Merlin and our supporters, it's also a reminder of our commitment to reduce the shockingly large number of women around the world who die from childbirth.

It was the experience of being a mother that made former EastEnders star Lucy Speed such a keen supporter of Merlin.

She told us: "Drugs, midwives, doctors, monitoring machines and a fully equipped operating theatre – they all played a part in bringing my beautiful daughter into the world last year. I was lucky. Everything I needed was on hand.

"But what about women in the countries where Merlin works? How do they survive labour when the baby gets stuck, is breech, turns at the last minute or arrives too early? Sadly, many don't. And that's something that

Merlin is working to change."

Lucy knows that the support she gives to Merlin is helping to give mothers around the world the care they need. It is helping to equip clinics and hospitals and to train midwives so



Lucy Speed with her family.

**Without Qutbia's midwifery knowledge, Gul Jan might never have lived to see her bonny, healthy baby.**



A health worker weighs a baby in Taloqan Clinic, Afghanistan.

that they can deliver babies safely. Most importantly it is saving mothers' lives, as 28-year-old Gul Jan will tell you.

#### **How a mother's life was saved**

Gul Jan lives in a remote part of Afghanistan. When women in her part of the world are expecting a baby, they cannot usually rely on the help of a doctor or midwife, because such people are few and far between.

In fact, Gul Jan's pregnancy nearly ended in tragedy when she developed eclampsia. She became unconscious and would have died if she had been left untreated. But luckily one of her neighbours was Qutbia, a 26 year old midwifery student training with Merlin.

Qutbia's dedication to her community is amazing. She performs three deliveries every day. She also vaccinates babies and gives advice to new and expecting mothers.

When Qutbia found Gul Jan unconscious, she acted immediately and she knew what to do. Without her midwifery knowledge, Gul Jan might never have lived to see her bonny, healthy baby.

#### **Midwives make a difference**

Many of the countries where Merlin works have frighteningly high maternal mortality rates. Over 27% of women in Afghanistan dies in childbirth.

Yet we are already starting to change this. With your support, Merlin is training thousands of midwives who will go on to work in their own communities, caring for mothers and their babies. Each time a Merlin-trained midwife like Qutbia completes a safe delivery, she is saving a life that could otherwise have been lost.

The work we do to save mothers and babies inspires Lucy Speed and thousands of other Merlin supporters. Says Lucy: "Pregnancy and childbirth are magical. Every woman deserves to be supported through it. I had all the support in the world and now I want to support other mothers and their children."

**Thank you for what you have done to help save mothers' lives by supporting Merlin. Please continue to support our work so that we can train more midwives like Qutbia – and save many more mothers like Gul Jan.**

# Winning the fight against HIV

## How Merlin is changing lives through education, health care and community action

**In Kenya, well over a million people live with HIV – yet it is the disease that people fear to talk about. People who are HIV positive carry a stigma that is hard to shake off. But until people are able to speak honestly about HIV, to understand it, and to go for treatment when they need it, the disease will continue to spread and claim more lives.**

That is why, in Kenya and a number of other developing countries, Merlin – with your support – is at the forefront of the fight against HIV and AIDS.

### From fear to hope

Charles is a young man who lives in the Kenyan town of Kisii. Ten years ago, he was desperately sick with TB and terrified about taking an HIV test. Deep down he knew he was likely to be HIV positive, but he didn't want to face the truth. He believed his life would be over, that he would be cast out and would never get married or have children.

It was a Merlin health worker who encouraged him to take the test and was by his side as he began to take his treatment. We also encouraged him to join a support group that we were running for people who are HIV positive. It was at that support group he met his wife Elizabeth. They married in 2007 and



Photos: Ben Langdon

Charles and Elizabeth with their family.



*"I am very happy that the babies I have will grow up to become big, healthy people and they will have their mum and dad."*



← Kenya  
Kisii is a city located in southwestern Kenya, a vibrant town with a population of over 83,000.

← Elizabeth and Charles' daughter Benedict. Thanks to supporters like you she now has a future free from HIV.

five years on they have three children, all born HIV negative.

What's more, it isn't by chance that Charles and Elizabeth's children have been born healthy.

Through all three of her pregnancies Elizabeth has been supported by Merlin's Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission programme. This includes drug treatment during pregnancy and birth, safe delivery of the baby at a health centre, advice on breast feeding and nutrition and counselling for both mother and father.

Since Merlin's work began in Kisii, transmission of HIV from mothers to children has been cut by as much as twenty per cent.

#### **"There is still life"**

Elizabeth and Charles are now living the life neither of them imagined they'd have. They have a small patch of land where they keep two goats and grow their own vegetables,

many of which they grow as a result of the nutrition training they have received from Merlin.

The couple are also active members of a number of support groups which Merlin has helped to set up in the Kisii area, helping others in the way they were once helped. The groups organise income-earning projects for people who have no money coming in; and give home based care to people living with HIV. They also raise awareness of HIV and AIDS, telling people what they can do to stop the infection spreading, and encouraging people who think they might be HIV positive to go for testing and treatment.

"I encourage the other women that despite being HIV positive there is still life and I am a living example of this," says Elizabeth. "I tell them, they can also have HIV negative babies and live long. I am very happy that the babies I have will grow up to become big, healthy people and they will have their mum and dad."



# My ten years on the frontline

**Having worked everywhere from Haiti to Pakistan, Paula Sansom has been with Merlin for over ten years. Here she tells you about some of her most memorable moments.**

Although I've been on the frontline for many disasters and you would think I might have been desensitised by now, it breaks my heart every time I see people suffering. During Cyclone Sidr in Bangladesh, the flood water had reached the top of a two storey high clinic and they were standing on the roof, pulling their fellow neighbours from the water as they were swept past.

After the Haiti earthquake, I was meant to go out there for two weeks but I ended up staying for three months. With the already fragile health system destroyed, the community was in dire need of health care. Our team set up a tented surgical hospital on the grounds of an abandoned tennis court. Our goal was to salvage limbs and reduce the number of amputations. In the space of just a few weeks, we carried out 348 operations on 158 patients.

## **Rewarding work**

One of the more rewarding aspects of my work is when I meet patients who have benefited



Paula Sansom treats a patient on the roadside in Georgia.



Photo: Jeroen Oerleman

Haitian Dahanna Guerrier (8) relaxes before reconstructive surgery on her hand.

from our health care. When I returned to Haiti almost a year after the earthquake, I met Dahanna, a young girl who had surgery on her hand. The first hospital she went to told her that the hand would have to be amputated. Luckily, she came to us and one year on, she had almost a full range of movement in her hand again.

If you ask me what keeps me going, it is the progress that I know we've made during my time with Merlin. We've worked in so many countries, responded to so many emergencies. It is a never ending task - but I hope that in my lifetime, we will reach a point where the health services in these developing countries are strong enough to stand on their own.





# Merlin at 20 – a cause for celebration!

**2013 marks Merlin's 20th birthday – and although we won't be taking much time out to celebrate, it's a welcome opportunity to say thank you to the long-serving staff and volunteers who have made our work possible.**

Events are taking place around the world. They include celebrations at our district offices in Afghanistan, a party in Chad and a dance in North Kivu in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In a number of countries, including Kenya, Nepal and South Sudan, certificates are being presented to long-serving Merlin staff in recognition of their sheer energy and dedication. Long may their work continue!



Photos: Celebrations in Nepal, South Sudan, Sudan and Democratic Republic of the Congo.

## 200

**Merlin staff across our country teams celebrated our 20th anniversary.**



# Catching a killer

Aung Myint Oo lives in Kalay township in Myanmar (Burma). At the age of 26, he supports a family of seven with farming and other manual work.

He told us: "Six months ago, I started to cough continuously and had a slight fever, on and off. To begin with I used some traditional home remedies but they didn't work. I lost my appetite and over the course of a month I lost a lot of weight. I felt exhausted and too weak and tired to work.



Aung Myint Oo.

"I didn't know what was happening to me, or what to do to end my suffering."

Fortunately for Aung Myint Oo, help was at hand. A Merlin team arrived in his village to conduct a health education session. When he went along, he found that much of the session focused on tuberculosis – what the signs and symptoms are, and how it can be transmitted, prevented and treated.

## The road to recovery

Just in time, Aung Myint Oo realised what his illness might be. "After the session, I talked to a Merlin staff member and our village health worker, who listened to my story and suggested I get a sputum examination to find out if I had TB."

The test turned out positive and Aung Myint Oo was referred to a national TB control programme at Kalay Hospital. But thanks to Merlin's advice, he had been diagnosed early enough to be treated successfully. "When my TB was confirmed, I felt shocked," he remembers. "But our village volunteer health worker encouraged me not to be so worried."

Aung Myint Oo's story had a happy ending. He says: "I took my drugs without fail and I felt better every day. After two months I had recovered. I could eat normally and my breathlessness left me."

***"I took my drugs without fail and I felt better every day. After two months I had recovered."***



## How Merlin's health education is helping people spot the signs of tuberculosis before it becomes fatal



Aung Myint Oo (left) talks to two Merlin health workers.

What's more, he couldn't be more grateful to Merlin for telling him about the disease in time and encouraging him to go for testing.

### **The forgotten killer**

Merlin has been working in Myanmar since 2004, with a particular emphasis on providing health care to people in remote areas. That includes preventive care to combat potentially deadly diseases – one of the most important of which is tuberculosis.

Tuberculosis is almost forgotten about in the UK, but in countries like Myanmar it is still a health threat of epidemic proportions. Worldwide it causes the deaths of nearly 1.5 million people each year.

And yet it is a curable disease – which is why, with your support, Merlin is determined to stamp it out. We are promoting health education so that people recognise the signs and go for help the way that Aung Myint Oo

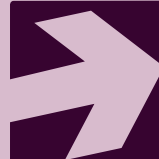


A Merlin health worker observes TB treatment in Tamu, Myanmar.

did. We are immunising people against the disease, supporting hospitals and clinics and providing drugs for people in poor communities.

Thanks to your generosity to Merlin, being diagnosed with tuberculosis is no longer a potential death sentence for many people like Aung Myint Oo. Today he is healthy and happy again – and able to work to support his family.

**Please continue to support this work, so that Merlin can help to banish tuberculosis from many other lives.**



### **Want to know more?**

Please go to our website for more in-depth information on this situation:

**[www.merlin.org.uk](http://www.merlin.org.uk)**

# Up for a challenge!



## Meet the amazing people who are raising funds for Merlin – and find out how you can join them

### Tea with the stars

Actor Hugh Bonneville and rock legend Ronnie Wood may seem an unlikely team, but one thing they have in common is their support for Merlin's life-saving work. In February they invited fans to bid on eBay for the opportunity to have afternoon tea with them at the Savoy Hotel. The icing on the cake was that it raised a fantastic £1,193.

### Up a mountain for Merlin

Some people will stretch themselves to the limit for Merlin. That's what a plucky team of staff members from global advertising agency JWT did when they took the Kinabalu Challenge. It involves hiking, biking and rafting through spectacular Borneo rainforest before climbing 4,100 metres to the top of Mount Kinabalu. The total raised is expected to be over £10,000. Thanks guys!

### Walking tall in the Highlands

Congratulations and thanks to Elliot Tilling who recently completed the 96-mile West Highland Way for Merlin, raising £410. Elliot is soon off to medical school – a Merlin hero now and perhaps in the future?

### Can you go the distance for Merlin?

If you fancy joining a challenge event to raise money for Merlin, and having a lot of fun in the process, can we suggest the following events taking place later this year?

#### → London to Brighton cycle ride 8 September 2013

Join in the fun and cycle 54 miles, starting in south London and ending on the magnificent Brighton seafront. It's a great way to get fit and explore the idyllic Sussex scenery.

#### → Run to the Beat 8 September 2013

This is a unique 13.1 mile run to music. It starts and ends at the iconic O2, and the course will take you past 13 music stations playing everything from hip hop to rock.

#### → Royal Parks Half Marathon 6 October, 2013

This picturesque half marathon, starting and finishing in Hyde Park, takes in five of the Royal Parks and many of London's most famous landmarks.





↑ The challenge team from JWT took on a climb of 4,100 metres to the top of Mount Kinabalu in Borneo.

If you are interested in taking part in any of these events for Merlin, please email **challengingyou@merlin.org.uk** or call **020 7014 1707** with your name and contact details. You will receive an information pack, including fundraising materials.

**We would also like to say a big 'THANK YOU' to all the London Marathon, Brighton Marathon and Bupa 10K runners who have run for us this year.**

### Christmas Carol Service

Our Carol Service is always a wonderful occasion, so you may want to save the date of 27 November for this year's service in St Bartholomew Church in London's Smithfields. The church is one of London's oldest churches and has been used in films such as *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, and *Shakespeare in Love*.

### Jaro's a winner!

Merlin is taking part with other major charities in an exciting new fundraising initiative – a new billion-dollar global game for good called Jaro. It costs US\$10 (approximately £6.40) to play and it's great fun to do. You compete against real people across the world in an online knockout tournament rather like a numerical version of Battleships.



Hugh Bonneville and Ronnie Wood share afternoon tea with Ulrich Volker (centre) at the Savoy Hotel.

Unlike other lotteries or online games, players decide how much of their ticket price they wish to donate to charity and how much they want to go into the winner's jackpot. You can play Jaro now, and help to raise funds for Merlin and many other good causes, at **www.jaro.com**

### London marathon

This year's London marathon took place on 21st April, with 39 runners for Merlin, 5 of which were own place runners and we hope to raise £65,000. If you would like to run next year please email **challengingyou@merlin.org.uk** or call **020 7014 1707**.



The Merlin team cheer on runners in the London Marathon.

## Your legacy

# A gift in your will can give children like Asha the chance to grow up healthy

Asha was just two months old when her mother died. Her grandmother didn't know what to do when Asha's body started to swell up – a sure sign of malnutrition. But she knew Merlin could help. She took Asha to Merlin's health centre a few miles from her village, where we gave her life-saving treatment. Within two weeks, Asha was a healthier, happier child – much to the delight of her proud grandma.

Merlin believes passionately that every child has the right to grow up healthy. That's why last year, working with partners across the world, we treated 94,000 undernourished children; vaccinated 150,000 babies against measles and provided the support needed to deliver 100,000 babies safely.

What's more, by helping poor communities to build up their own health services, and training health workers and midwives, we are bringing health care within reach of millions of children for the very first time.

We have achieved so much, but as long as children continue to die from hunger and disease, we have to go on working. And that is why we need your help, not just now but in years to come. Please consider leaving a gift to Merlin in your will.



Photo: The Times/Paul Rogers

## We treated 94,000 undernourished children last year.

**To find out how to leave a gift to Merlin, please complete the slip below to ask for a copy of the Merlin True Friends Legacy Guide, free and completely without obligation.**

Registered charity 1135111

### Please send me a copy of the *True Friends Merlin Legacy Guide*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Tel: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete this form and return in the freepost envelope provided to:  
Merlin, FREEPOST RLZE-EGYR-JAGH, 12th Floor, 207 Old Street, London, EC1V 9NR. (No stamp required).