



Improving Reproductive Healthcare in Darfur

Merlin has launched an emergency reproductive healthcare programme in Darfur, western Sudan, to help in what the UN has described as the world's worst humanitarian crisis. Having been driven from their homes, more than a million people lack adequate healthcare, food, water and sanitation.

There are persistent attacks on civilians by Janjaweed militia, and reports indicate that rape and gender-based violence are increasing. Merlin's assessments have revealed a severe lack of reproductive healthcare in the region, resulting in appalling levels of maternal and infant mortality. Antenatal care coverage for El Geneina district is 39 percent, and fewer than 20 percent of births are assisted by skilled attendants, it is estimated, and little care is available for victims of sexual violence.

Merlin is working to provide and support reproductive healthcare at El Geneina Hospital and in seven surrounding refugee camps currently inhabited by more than 140,000 people.

Many of the births that occur in the camps and settlements around El Geneina take place without the help of trained midwives, significantly increasing the risk of death of mother and child. Problems are compounded by high rates of malnutrition amongst women. Pregnant women often cannot reach the hospital because roads are unsafe or transport is too expensive. Those who do reach hospital often arrive too late for effective intervention, and within El Geneina Hospital, Merlin

found a serious shortage of beds and delivery kits, resuscitation equipment and proper sterilisation equipment.

Merlin is equipping and supporting midwives to work in the seven camps, to assist with deliveries at 'home' and to advice on antenatal and postnatal Geneina refresher training in obstetrics and on sexual and gender-based violence issues to enable them to raise community awareness and provide first aid treatment to victims.

In El Geneina Hospital, Merlin is working to establish a reproductive healthcare unit which will offer antenatal and postnatal services, and sexual and gender-based violence care.

An ambulance referral system, for urgent and high risk cases, will be established between the camps and the hospital. Desk Manager Jeremie Bodin, who has recently returned from Sudan, said: "Ensuring the most basic survival needs of war affected populations are met continues to be a major challenge for the humanitarian community working in Sudan.

"El Geneina Hospital's reproductive healthcare services were almost non-existent prior to the conflict. Today it is completely overwhelmed by the demands of the displaced population. As there are no indications that this population will return in the near future, international health assistance will be required for many months to come."

Emergency Response to Water Contamination Crisis

In July this year torrential rains flooded the Varzob River valley, Tajikistan, resulting in heavy contamination of the water supply in the country's capital, Dushanbe.

For several days an estimated 400,000 residents were left without access to clean water and at risk of water-borne diseases, especially typhoid.

"Our previous experience in responding to typhoid outbreaks in Dushanbe made us very alarmed about the potential severity of the situation," says Joy Guillemot, Merlin's Tajikistan country manager at the time.

"In 1997, 30,000 people got typhoid. When we saw what looked like chocolate milk coming out of the taps and realised how contaminated the water was, we decided we had to intervene very quickly to prevent a catastrophe.

"To prepare for potential disease outbreaks, Merlin delivered medicines, supplied clinics and hospitals with water and sanitation equipment, and launched a major hygiene promotion campaign using leaflets, posters, TV and radio messages and workshops.

"We also trained medical professionals in the detection and treatment of water-borne diseases, thereby improving the health system's capacity to deal with future outbreaks. Our ability to respond immediately was critical, and helped to avert a potentially major epidemic."

Merlin has been working in Tajikistan since 1996. Tajikistan is among the world's poorest countries, with more than 80 per cent of the population living below the poverty line. The region is highly prone to natural disasters, including landslides, avalanches, floods and earthquakes.

Today Merlin is continuing to work on disease control and prevention by training health workers and supporting laboratories. We are also helping communities in the Rasht Valley to be better prepared for natural disasters and disease outbreaks.



Preparing for Extreme Emergencies

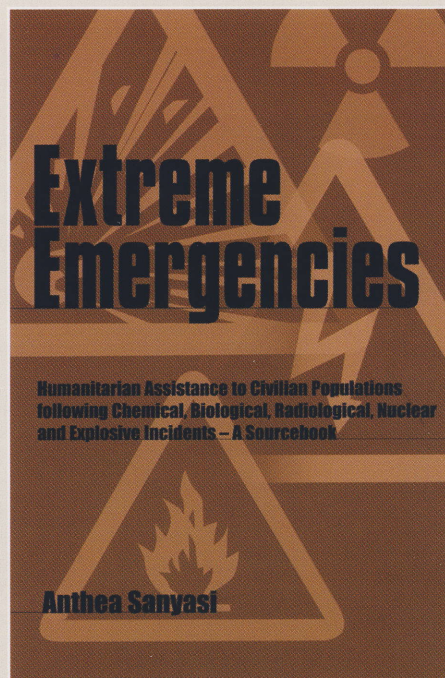
A comprehensive source book which explains how humanitarian organisations can prepare for chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear or explosive (CBRNE) disasters has been published. Extreme Emergencies is the first book of its kind, and it has been produced by a group of humanitarian agencies, led by Merlin.

Developed countries have the expertise and infrastructure to deal with incidents like the Tokyo subway sarin gas attack and the Three Mile Island nuclear accident. But, in developing countries, emergency services may be unable to respond effectively and they are likely to require humanitarian assistance.

Merlin and the partner agencies, all experienced in working in natural disaster and conventional warfare contexts, identified the need for detailed information on potential CBRNE disasters and procedures for helping those affected. The book will help humanitarian agencies plan for such an eventuality.

Written by Anthea Sanyasi, an independent consultant in emergency response and planning, the book draws on advice from a wide range of international and inter-governmental organisations, as well as the UK government.

Dr Tim Healing, an independent consultant on humanitarian aid, says: "Merlin and its collaborators are to be congratulated on identifying a real need and in producing a book that will be a 'must have' in the field libraries of humanitarian agencies working in disaster zones throughout the world."



Picturing Bam One Year On

On 26 December 2003, a devastating earthquake struck the southern Iranian town of Bam, leaving more than 26,000 people dead, an estimated 30,000 injured and up to 75,000 homeless. To mark the first anniversary of the disaster, photographer Nevil Mountford is working in association with Merlin on a unique project provisionally entitled "A Day in the Life of Bam".

A group of 60 local people from a range of different backgrounds have been given disposable cameras to create a photographic record of a day in their lives. The project aims to illustrate how ordinary people are rebuilding their lives in the aftermath of the tragedy.

Merlin responded to the Bam disaster within 72 hours, sending in a team of doctors, nurses and logisticians to carry out emergency assessments and distribute emergency medical supplies. Today, we are still operational in Bam and are continuing to work with the local Ministry of Health to rehabilitate health facilities. The emergency phase is over, but relief agencies estimate it will take up to 10 years to rebuild and rehabilitate the historic town.



A selection of the photographs is being exhibited at the Spitz Gallery in Spitalfields, London, from 22-28 November. Admission will be free. We hope the project will not only provide a unique insight into how the people of Bam are recovering, but also remind the world of the enormity of the disaster and the help still needed.

Reaching Isolated Communities

Merlin recently responded to a cholera outbreak in one of the most isolated areas of Maniema province in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The town of Kasese and surrounding villages were previously inaccessible due to years of conflict. Health facilities were looted or destroyed by armed forces, or simply ceased to function because they ran out of medical supplies.

The population has had no access to routine vaccinations for about 10 years and is therefore highly susceptible to diseases.

These communities are also isolated due to the physical environment, which consists of dense rainforests and rivers. Many roads and bridges fell into disrepair during the war and are now impassable to vehicles.

Although the security situation remains fragile, it is now possible to access many areas which were previously under militia control and cut off from humanitarian assistance.

When Merlin was alerted of a cholera outbreak in September 2004, our team based in Punia flew into Kasese by helicopter and immediately began treating cases, and sending test samples back to laboratories.

In Kasese, staff were informed of another cholera outbreak in Kibeleketa, a village situated 35 kilometres away. But the roads to Kibeleketa were in such a bad state that our team could not even travel by motorbike.

Natalie Hogg, Merlin's DR Congo country manager, says: "The team simply had no option but to walk for 35 kilometres. Part of the journey involved getting down a steep four-metre bank to cross a river by canoe because the bridge had collapsed."

Merlin managed to control the two cholera outbreaks and now intends to extend primary healthcare support to these previously inaccessible areas. Subject to funding, we hope to make monthly visits to Kasese and Kibeleketa to deliver medicines and to rehabilitate health facilities.

A Lifetime of Dedication



Professor Tim Cullinan

Professor Tim Cullinan, a committed Merlin volunteer who dedicated his life to caring for the needy and underprivileged, died on 25 May, 2004, aged 71.

Tim was a gifted doctor, inspirational teacher and pioneer of public health, whose philosophy was to help where the need was greatest, in the UK and around the world.

Throughout his career, he was supported by his devoted wife and constant companion, Helen (known to all as Tigger).

Born in north London on 18 July 1932, Tim was educated at

Ampleforth College, York, and Trinity College, Cambridge, before beginning his training at Guy's Hospital, London, in 1954.

In 1959, the doctor and his family set off for the West Nile, Uganda, where he trained in obstetrics and gynaecology and worked as a medical officer. He returned to the UK in 1962 and worked as a GP in Kent for some 10 years before deciding to retrain in social medicine.

Tim was later appointed to develop the department of preventive and environmental medicine at Bart's Hospital in London.

Various positions in the USSR, south-east Asia and Gambia followed, until 1986 when Tim set off for southwest Tanzania to build and commission a 400-bed specialist referral hospital and to work on tuberculosis and leprosy programmes. He moved on to Malawi in 1990 to set up the department of community medicine at the University of Malawi's College of Medicine. Tim returned to the UK in 1997, by which time he was already ill with prostate cancer. In 1999, he was awarded an OBE in recognition of his work in Malawi. That same year, at an age when most doctors retire, Tim took up an unpaid position with Merlin.

His first mission with Merlin was to Tomsk in Siberia, where he developed a TB control programme in prisons. He later moved on to Georgia where he set up a similar project. Even when his health had deteriorated, Tim remained involved with Merlin and even continued to ride his bicycle to work when one of his legs became paralysed.

Explaining his desire to join Merlin in an interview in 2002, Tim said: "When you emerge tattered, but not completely bowed, from a professional lifetime kicking round the world, the horrors of retirement spent entirely on the allotment or DIY seem formidable. Moving on means others can move up, and that is as it should be, but the mind and the spirit do not always wither with the body and finding a residual use for them is one of the challenges of older age. For me, Merlin has proved just such a haven."

Geoff Prescott, Chief Executive of Merlin, recalls: "For a world figure in TB, public health and medical education, Tim was a humble man committed to the work he was doing. Always displaying great dignity, intellect and humour, Tim's thoughts and teaching live on in the thousands he touched through his life."

Tim is survived by his wife, five children and seventeen grandchildren.

Run for us. Save lives

Are you running the 25th Flora London Marathon in 2005? Would you consider running it for Merlin? We need your support.

If you do not get a ballot entry but still want to run, you can apply for one of our Golden Bond Places. You will be guaranteed a place in the most exciting marathon in the world!

We will provide you with a fundraising pack, tips to get you started and a T-shirt. We will also be there on the day to celebrate your achievement with you.

Application forms for a Golden Bond place can be downloaded from our website www.merlin.org.uk. Alternatively, call Liz on 020 7065 0832 for an application form. More information on the marathon itself can be found at www.london-marathon.co.uk.

Congratulations and many thanks to the 2004 London Marathon Merlin team who ran and raised over £45,000 to support Merlin's lifesaving work.



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Would you like to increase the value of your gift? UK charities are entitled to 28 percent tax reclaim from the Inland Revenue on donations from UK taxpayers.

So, when you make a donation to Merlin, don't forget to Gift Aid it. Every £1 you give is worth £1.28. You can confirm that you are a UK taxpayer simply by ticking and signing the spaces provided in the donation coupon. Or download a Gift Aid form from our website, complete it, and send it to us. Alternatively, just call and let us know you would like to Gift Aid all your donations. You only have to do this once.

There are benefits for higher-rate taxpayers. You can reclaim tax relief on your gross donation at 18%. For example, if you donate £100 we can reclaim £28.21 and you can reclaim another £23.08. Your donation and Gift Aid will go a long way to helping Merlin increase the help and support it can provide to beneficiaries. Between January and September this year, we reclaimed a total of £10,886.50 from the taxman, thanks to you!