

Autumn 08

The newsletter for Merlin supporters

# RESPONSE

► Highlights from the last 15 years

► Reaching the remote villages of Nepal

► Bringing health care to Palestinians

## Merlin is 15



**merlin**

# ► Bringing vital health care to Palestinians

Since the construction of a security perimeter (or Wall) that runs between Israel and the Palestinian territories, Palestinians have faced increasing difficulties accessing health care. Dr Nigel Pearson has recently completed an assessment for Merlin in this troubled area.

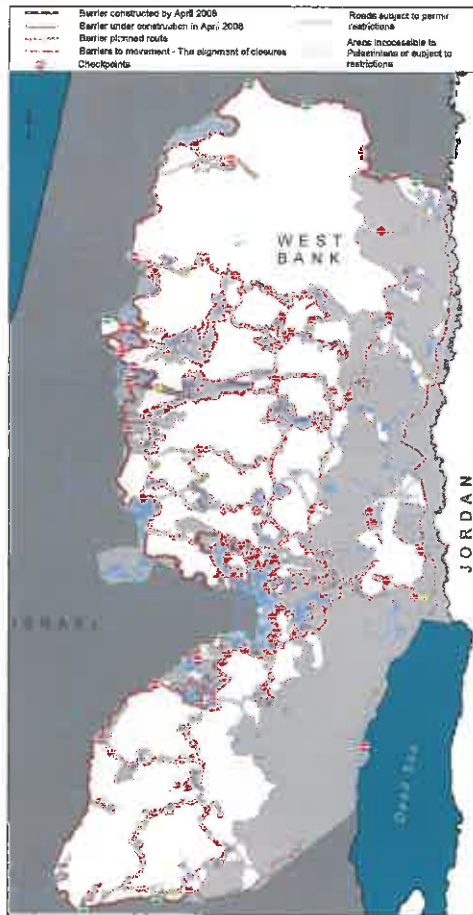
Merlin has been helping communities in the West Bank and Gaza since 2002. Currently, Merlin supports clinics in 15 communities in two districts of the West Bank.

These communities are amongst the hardest hit by the security perimeter. With no access to jobs and severe movement restrictions within the West Bank unemployment has increased dramatically. One difficult to access village, Jayyus, now has 70% unemployment, with half of their fields and olive groves lying on the other side of the security wall. Poverty has increased and it is even more difficult for families to get enough food.

Looking at the map of these districts, it is easy to see how complicated just moving between towns has become. Neighbouring villagers now have to travel 40 km to get to each other, and villagers have to go through a checkpoint every time they go shopping.

Merlin works in the village of Azzoun Atma, which is completely encircled by the security wall. Every time the nurse leaves the village she is searched and must show papers. Twice she has been turned back when accompanying women in labour, and, even though she is not trained as a midwife, she has had to help them to deliver at home. UNFPA, (the United Nations Population Fund), has documented cases of women whose babies died at birth because they could not get through checkpoints quickly enough.

Merlin supports clinics in these isolated communities by bringing in Palestinian GPs, specialist doctors, nurses, health educators and laboratory specialists. With the support of funding through ECHO (European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office), Merlin has re-equipped many of these clinics, trained staff, and has greatly increased access to first line health services,



Map source: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

**“Neighbouring villagers now have to travel 40 km to get to each other, and villagers have to go through a checkpoint every time they go shopping.”**



Photo by Dr Nigel Pearson

*Merlin has been working to re-equip clinics and train staff*

as well as increasing the knowledge of women and young people about healthy living.

Merlin has also helped the Ministry of Health to set up mobile health teams in closed areas, and has brought quality health care to vulnerable groups like pregnant women, children and the elderly. Patient questionnaires have shown a high level of satisfaction with Merlin's programme, and Palestinian health workers feel well supported by Merlin in these two districts.

Key recommendations of the recent assessment include for Merlin to expand to more marginalised communities, and to increase the capacity of health staff to look after the needs of adults who have chronic conditions such as high blood pressure, heart and chest disease. Merlin also plans to collaborate further with other key health organisations to help women get to hospital for deliveries and to strengthen the management of childhood illnesses.

In summary, Merlin's programme greatly enhances the Ministry of Health's capacity to help communities made vulnerable by the closure system, thereby increasing access to essential health care. With its experience in cutting-edge programmes around the world, Merlin is particularly suited to helping in the West Bank, both in the short term to bring in mobile teams and in the longer term to build up the capacity of the Palestinian health system.

# ► The forgotten country

A peace deal in June 2008 finally ended a decade of coups, rebellions and conflict in the Central African Republic (CAR). Over a million people have been affected by the violence. Merlin's Sally Clarke recently visited to find out how the country is recovering.

When I first started researching for my visit to CAR, the few articles I could find were dominated by its conflict-mired neighbours: Chad, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The hard facts I managed to glean were daunting: twice as many women die in childbirth than a decade ago and life expectancy is 43 years.

What I saw was a totally neglected health service. In Nana Gribizi district, I met the only qualified midwife, responsible for nearly 50,000 women. She told me that over 10% of babies die during birth and almost 20% of children won't live to see their 5th birthday.

Fortunately, Merlin is helping to bring about change. We've been working with the Ministry of Health for a year now. In that time, we've employed people from local communities to rebuild and renovate health facilities. We've established a drug management and supply chain, so health workers have the drugs they need to save lives. We've also introduced free health care to encourage people to use the clinics again, rather than relying on local healers. And crucially, we've started on-the-job training for over 100 health workers, some of whom haven't had any learning for over 25 years.

We have, in the words of one nurse, "helped to breathe life back into the lungs of the primary health care system"

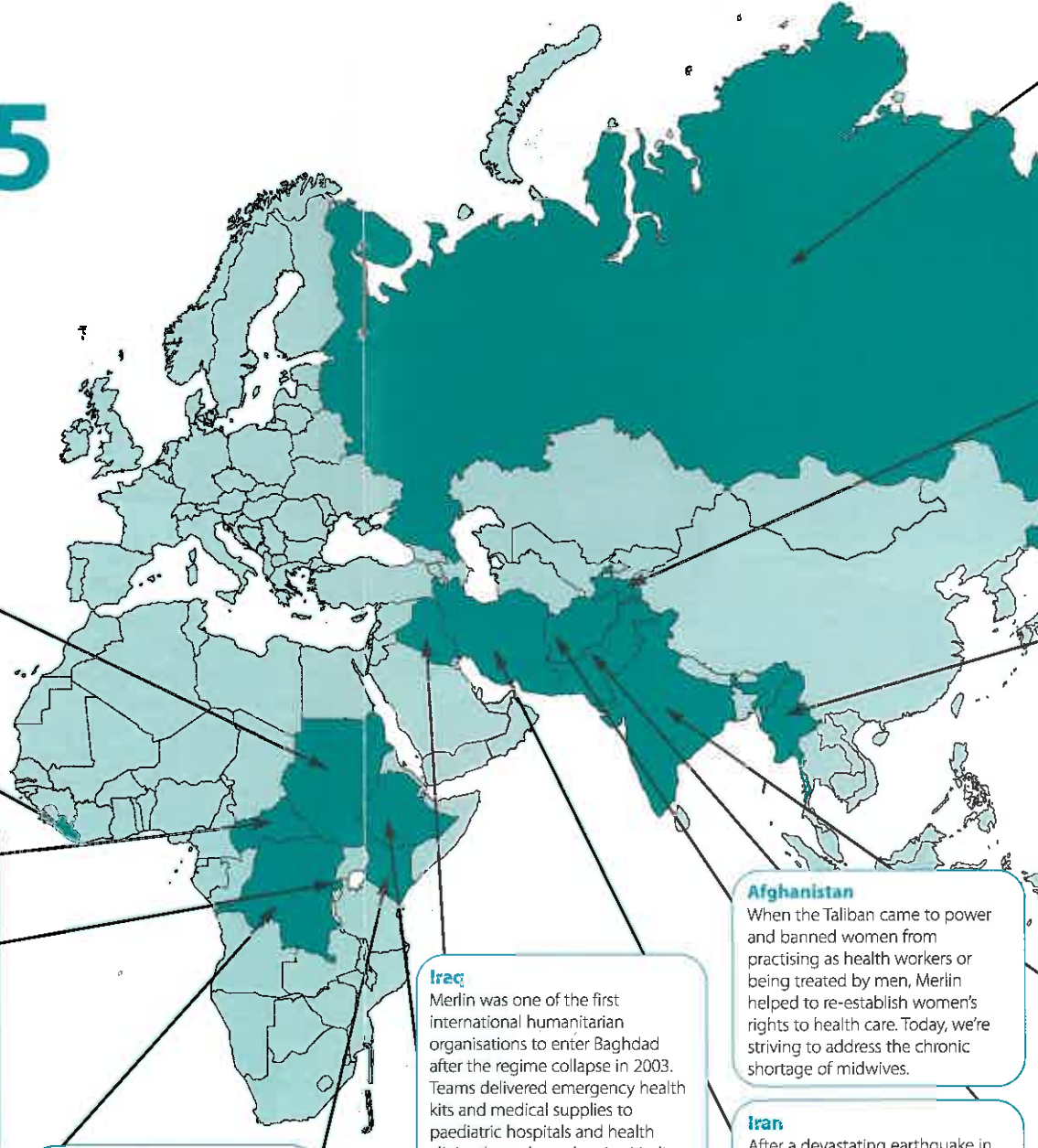


*Merlin is working to improve mother and child health care*

# ▶ We are 15

In early 1993, from an office set up in a spare bedroom, Merlin organised its first mission: a convoy bound for war-torn Bosnia carrying £1 million worth of essential food and medicines.

Since then Merlin has grown dramatically. We have worked in 39 countries and responded to some of the most serious humanitarian emergencies of recent history. Last year alone, Merlin's work made a direct impact on over 5 million people and nearly 20 million indirectly. To mark our 15th birthday, here are 15 of our achievements.



## Celebrating 10 years in Liberia

Merlin first started providing emergency medical aid in Liberia at a time of great instability, and was one of the few international agencies to remain working there during intense fighting at the height of the conflict. Ten years on, as the West African nation has moved into a period of relative peace and optimism, Merlin's work now focuses on assisting the Ministry of Health in rebuilding a sustainable health system for a population which suffers some of the worst health problems in the world.

## Rwanda

In 1995 an attack on the Kibeho refugee camp killed thousands of civilians. Around 20,000 survivors were herded into a football stadium at gunpoint. Within hours, Merlin had set up an emergency field station within the stadium and treated 700 individuals in a single afternoon.

## Sudan

From Southern Darfur, Merlin operates a network of clinics which have been inundated by people fleeing the conflict. Without Merlin, no treatment would be available to mothers and children suffering from common killers such as diarrhoea and respiratory infections.

## Central African Republic (CAR)

Merlin began working in CAR in response to the crisis that also affected neighbouring Darfur and Chad in 2007. In January 2008, a meningitis epidemic broke out in Nana Gribizi. In collaboration with the World Health Organisation, Merlin staff prepared a response and vaccinated more than 38,000 people in the project area. Merlin is also working to rehabilitate health centres and address the chronic shortage of health workers through training.

## Democratic Republic of Congo

Merlin currently supports a network of 110 health facilities providing essential health care, medicines and epidemic monitoring for over 645,000 people.

## Kenya

We originally responded to a severe outbreak of malaria in Kisii and Gucha, western Kenya. Since then, Merlin has worked to strengthen local health services to respond to Malaria, as well as supporting four voluntary HIV testing and counselling clinics.

## Iraq

Merlin was one of the first international humanitarian organisations to enter Baghdad after the regime collapse in 2003. Teams delivered emergency health kits and medical supplies to paediatric hospitals and health clinics throughout the city. Merlin also provided water and sanitation projects for 35,000 people.

## Ethiopia

Merlin is implementing water sanitation schemes that will provide 37,500 people in Bale Zone with safe drinking water.

## Afghanistan

When the Taliban came to power and banned women from practising as health workers or being treated by men, Merlin helped to re-establish women's rights to health care. Today, we're striving to address the chronic shortage of midwives.

## Iran

After a devastating earthquake in Bam, Merlin responded within 72 hours, distributing truckloads of emergency medical supplies, hygiene packs and essential water and sanitation items. Merlin stayed in Bam for more than a year following the disaster, and helped build and refurbish 32 Medical Houses and 11 Health Centres.

## Russia

Following the collapse of communism, Russia experienced a 42% increase in Tuberculosis cases. To combat this rise, Merlin pioneered ground-breaking treatment methods, combining traditional systems with new home-based treatment. The work was so successful that it was adopted by the Ministry of Health as the nationwide flagship programme for TB treatment.

## Tajikistan

The post-Soviet Union conflict left 60,000 people dead and 600,000 homeless. Merlin supported local health services and provided laboratory equipment and health workers to identify and treat diseases such as Malaria, Typhoid and Brucellosis.

## Myanmar

Merlin provided an immediate emergency response to the cyclone that hit the country in May 2008. We worked fast to provide immediate primary health care and clean water, treating over 26,000 people in the first three months. We are still working in the Irrawaddy Delta, focusing on building up long term health care by training over 1000 health professionals and looking to improve mother and child health care.

## India

The Gujarat earthquake of 2001 left over 25,000 people dead and more than a million homeless. Merlin constructed and rebuilt health facilities, providing 14 health centres, a maternity ward, a blood bank and Ministry of Health offices in Bhuj.

## Pakistan

Merlin responded within 24 hours to the 2005 earthquake that claimed over 73,000 lives. Vital medical aid and shelter was provided to communities stranded in mountainous regions, often reachable only by helicopter.



## ► Training essential frontline volunteers in Nepal

**For people in rural Nepal, getting access to health services can mean a journey of up to two days by donkey, or on foot. This results in many avoidable deaths, most notably amongst pregnant women and their babies.**

To combat this, Merlin is currently providing a seven-day ante and postnatal training course for local Female Community Health Volunteers (FCHVs). It teaches the essential skills necessary to prepare for child birth, and gives information about new-born care that can be passed on to mothers and families in the community. This potentially life-saving training costs 6,000 NpRps (£48).

Once the course is completed, we give each FCHV a working kit containing basic preventative items to treat common illnesses such as dehydration, worm infestation and infections. We also provide training materials like flip charts to help the FCHV educate others.

Merlin has been working with FCHVs in Nepal since 2006. We believe they are a crucial link to the community and an important way to ensure female participation in the health care system.



*Top: People queue for a mobile clinic in a remote region of Nepal.*



*Right: Training is a vital part of Merlin's programme in Nepal*

**"For people in rural Nepal, getting access to health services can mean a journey of up to two days by donkey, or on foot."**

## ► You shop, we all benefit

Olive Branch is an innovative new way to support charities when you shop online - without actually costing you a penny.

The UK's leading retailers - such as John Lewis, Boots and M&S - feature their most popular products at the Olive Branch virtual department store. You won't pay a penny more to buy the products at Olive Branch and every purchase comes with an automatic donation to charity. Of course, we'd be delighted if you chose Merlin as your charity.

To find out more, just visit [www.anolivebranch.co.uk](http://www.anolivebranch.co.uk)

## ► A very fair trade

**If you have any small amounts of unwanted shares, there's a way you can use them to help charities like Merlin.**

Share Gift is a charity with an ingenious way of making money for other charities.

People have small holdings of shares for many different reasons, whether from privatisations, scrip dividends, inheritance splits or investments which have fallen in value. Such small amounts of shares are often difficult or impossible to dispose of because of the costs involved.

Share Gift aggregates and sells these parcels of donated shares, giving the proceeds to Merlin and a wide range of UK charities. Please mention Merlin when you donate.

To find out more, just visit [www.sharegift.org](http://www.sharegift.org)

## ► Merlin 2008 Christmas Cards



To order your Christmas cards, please complete the order form below and send with payment to:  
 Merlin, Freepost RLYJ-UJHU-EKHJ, Slough SL3 0EN or fax to 01753 684 899  
 To place orders over the phone please call us on 020 7014 1712

### Card Selection and Postage

	No. of Packs	Amount
Each pack of cards has 10 (ten) cards		
1 ▶ Red Berries @ £3.99 per pack		
2 ▶ St Paul's @ 4.99 per pack		
3 ▶ Snowflake Tree @ £3.99 per pack		
4 ▶ Partridge in a Pear Tree @ £4.99 per pack		
5 ▶ Boulevard de Clichy @ £4.99 per pack		
6 ▶ Three Kings @ £4.99 per pack		
7 ▶ Sprouts @ £3.25 per pack		

Postage & Packaging (UK only) (for 1st pack £1.60 for each additional pack £0.80)  
 If you place an order of more than 15 packs, we'll invoice you for the postage & packaging costs.

### Payment details

Cheque  Visa/Delta  Mastercard  Maestro

Name on card: \_\_\_\_\_

Card Number:

Start Date:     Expiry Date:     Issue Number (Maestro only):

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please make cheques payable to 'Merlin'

### Delivery Address

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone (daytime) \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_



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 EMAIL: supportercare@merlin.org.uk WEB: www.merlin.org.uk  
 Registered charity number: 1016607

*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.*