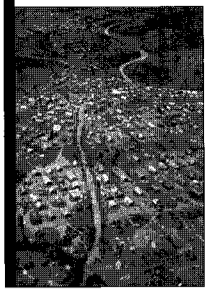
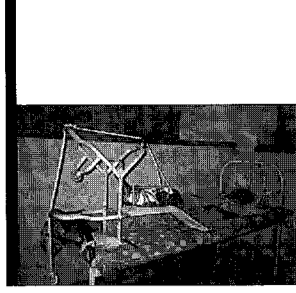


Medical supplies reach Grozny



Emergency in Rwandan camps



Surgical team to Sri Lanka

merlin
Medical Emergency Relief International
archive: do not remove!!

merlin
Medical Emergency Relief International

NEWS

summer 1995

MERLIN
Medical Emergency Relief International
Registered Charity No 1016607
1a Rede Place
London W2 4TU
Tel: 0171 229 4560

Quarterly Newsletter

Civilians caught in cross-fire

Health services for Sri Lankans face collapse as the war takes its toll

Civil war broke out in Sri Lanka in 1983 and has left hundreds of thousands of civilians displaced and more than 50,000 dead. A cease-fire last year, between the Tamil separatists and Sinhalese majority, raised hopes of peace. However in April, the fighting started again, write Dr Peter Greengross and Dr Michael Schubert.

The government has responded rapidly. Troops have been mobilised and taxes raised to boost a war effort which consumes US\$1m daily. Fighting is concentrated in the east and around the northern stronghold of the Tamil rebels, the Jaffna Peninsula. 600 people have been killed in six weeks and human rights abuses continue on both sides.

Despite this, Sri Lanka has all the signs of a rapidly developing country. Without the war, it is said, it would have the potential to become the next Singapore. There is a sophisticated economy and trade links, the population is increasingly well-educated and health services are developed.

Hidden behind these statistics, however, is the deteriorating health of the people living in conflict zones. MERLIN has recently completed a preliminary evaluation in the east of the country, where travel is restricted or forbidden. Health workers are unwilling or unable to reach these small rural hospitals and dispensaries. Public health services such as immunisation programmes, disease surveillance and sanitation programmes, and maternal and child health programmes, are collapsing.

In the larger, urban hospitals, it is difficult to recruit and retain staff. Surgical care has been particularly affected, because while demands on the service have increased, fewer surgeons remain to perform operations. Post-operative care is particularly poor, with patients denied basic, simple care.

The overflowing wards contain a pitiful collection of people suffering with unnecessary wound infections, un-united and infected fractures and limbs rendered functionless by contractures. It is a tragedy that whilst attempts are made to provide a supply of surgeons, their efforts are negated by the after-care provided on the wards. Training of hospital staff is non-existent and supplies of drugs and other essential medical equipment are often erratic and insufficient to meet the demand.

MERLIN is proposing a relief programme in Eastern Sri Lanka.

The aims are:

- To provide additional medical staff in Batticaloa and Ampara and train hospital staff;
- To establish mobile clinics around Batticaloa providing health care in previously inaccessible areas north of the town;
- To carry out further evaluations in the north of Sri Lanka.

The war is likely to escalate. Whilst attention is focused upon the myriad of disasters and conflicts around the world, civilians in Sri Lanka continue to suffer the direct affects of conflict, insufficient health care and the psychological consequences of this protracted and bitterly contested war.



Soldiers forced this woman and the rest of her village to walk across a mine field. The MERLIN team found many cases of human rights abuses



Emergency aid is sent to Chechnya

David Stewart-Smith

Future programmes

MERLIN is to double its number of programmes and volunteers in the field, representing £1.6m of concurrent project funding. Two evaluations will be planned each month to areas in urgent need of medical assistance. The evaluation teams will be 'on standby' to react to new emergencies, cutting MERLIN's response time still further.

Sri Lanka

- Renewed fighting between Tamil separatists and government forces has created emergency surgical needs in Sri Lanka.
- A surgical and training programme is planned to start in July.

Burma

- Attacks on the Karen and Shan people by the ruling Burmese State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) has left thousands of people displaced.
- MERLIN plans to assist these people, following an evaluation in July.

Kashmir

- At least 20,000 people have been killed in a five-year war between separatist Muslim guerrillas and Indian security forces.
- MERLIN aims to treat the war-wounded and provide health facilities for civilians.

Afghanistan

- Some 2 million refugees in Iran are being forced to return to western Afghanistan. Fighting along roads in Herat is preventing the refugees from reaching their homes.
- MERLIN will prepare for an emergency in the region.

Eastern Europe

- Diseases such as diphtheria and tuberculosis are resurfacing across the former Soviet republics, a result of collapsing health systems, declining stocks of drugs and plummeting rates of vaccination.
- A MERLIN evaluation will highlight where vaccinations, drug supply and training can help prevent a developing catastrophe.

Rwanda

- Fear still prevents thousands of Rwandan refugees from returning to Rwanda.
- MERLIN aims to encourage 600,000 refugees in Tanzania to return via a programme in Kibungo.

Burundi

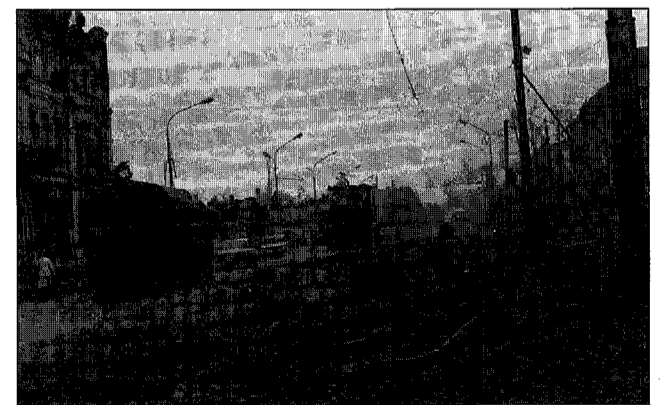
- There is increasing violence and ethnic tension in northern Burundi and the capital Bujumbura. Rwandan refugees in the north are particularly vulnerable.
- Preparations are underway for an emergency intervention if the situation deteriorates further. Refugees in Zaire and Tanzania are also being monitored.

Somaliiland

- Guerrilla activity in the north of Somalia has destroyed health facilities while in the south, thousands of returning refugees are straining health services.
- An evaluation to both areas will show how MERLIN can renew desperately needed health facilities and provide emergency preventative care.



Grozny, Harriet Logan



Grozny, Jessica Barry



Zaire, Adrian Arbib

News update

February: Health clinics are built at the new refugee camp in Goma, Lac Vert, ready for the arrival of over 40,000 Rwandan refugees.

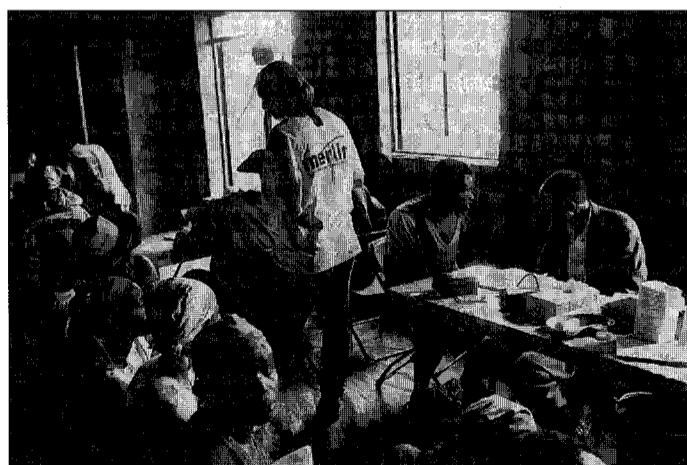
March: MERLIN starts to train female health staff in Kandahar, Afghanistan. Before, women were forbidden to work or to be educated. Training in public health education and child birth will reduce the high child mortality rate.

April: Thousands of Rwandans are injured during the closure of the Kibeho camp. 20,000 are forced to walk to the Butare stadium in Rwanda and arrive dehydrated and frightened. Many have serious injuries. MERLIN flies a surgeon from Britain. Its emergency team is the only one allowed to treat the injured at the Stadium.

May: There is renewed fighting in Sri Lanka and one hundred people are killed on average in a given week. A team from MERLIN arrives to plan a surgical programme in the eastern region.

June: MERLIN delivers £1.3m of aid to Grozny, the destroyed capital of Chechnya. The aid is supported by the EC Humanitarian Office. MERLIN can start vaccination programmes, open clinics and support hospitals with drugs and equipment.

July: Water and sanitation experts address the severe shortage of drinking water in Grozny, Chechnya. They bring clean water to 50,000 people daily, to prevent epidemics breaking out. A 100-bed ward is prepared in case of a cholera or typhoid epidemic amongst the population.



Rwanda, Adrian Arbib



Afghanistan, David Stewart-Smith

Emergency Fund Appeal

Please support MERLIN's work by filling in this coupon. All donations are welcome.

- £15 will buy antibiotics to treat 80 children
- £30 will buy 25 vaccinations against diphtheria

Cheques can be sent to:

MERLIN
PO Box 100
Tunbridge Wells
Kent TN2 5XN

For credit card donations, please call:
01892 540 040

Name
Address.....
.....
Telephone No.....

MERLIN needs medicines and funding to respond to emergencies like Kibeho. Without supplies and support, we cannot operate. That is why we need to raise an independent Emergency Fund.

Appeals on Radio Four's The Week's Good Cause, in national newspapers, as well as coverage on ITN and BBC news, have brought an excellent response in support of MERLIN's work. Please help us to reach tomorrow's emergency by filling in the coupon.

Tragedy at Kibeho

In April, the largely Tutsi Rwandan government decided to close camps for the 200,000 Hutu internally displaced inside Rwanda. It saw the camps as a safe haven for Hutu militias responsible for the 1994 genocide. On 18th April government troops surrounded the camps, herding the people onto one hillside. In Kibeho camp 100,000 men, women and children stood huddled together for four days and nights of constant rain without access to food, water, or latrines. On 22nd April the crowd panicked and broke through the government cordon. 100,000 people ran in all directions and the troops opened fire. A MERLIN team on the edge of the camp heard the first shots; the firing continued for hours. The number killed is a source of bitter dispute but some estimates put it as high as 8000. The next day the people were rounded up and marched into Butare where MERLIN set up clinics in the town's stadium. Over 700 of the badly wounded were treated.

MERLIN is prepared to respond to further emergencies in the region. While Rwanda now looks relatively stable, the presence of two million refugees outside Rwanda's borders, in Tanzania, Zaire and Burundi, is a continual threat. Each government has indicated it wants the refugees to go home. Events at Kibeho have shown that forced closures of camps on this scale could be catastrophic.

Adrian Arbib

MERLIN opens emergency clinics

Civilians in southern Grozny, Chechnya, suffered months of Russian bombardment but received little help from the outside world, writes Jessica Barry.

Roughly translated, Grozny means 'terrible' or 'awesome'. It is an apt term for the horror which has befallen this once elegant capital.

Malika is a patient at a home for the elderly and handicapped on the outskirts of the city. She has been struggling to care for 31 elderly fellow inmates during the months of fighting. The rest of the staff left when fighting started in December. When MERLIN arrived, there was no longer water, heat or power at the home. Medicines and food were in short supply.

We found Malika in the garden with four other women, digging a grave. 28 of the 100 or so residents of the home have died of hypothermia or starvation over the winter. Those who could, had fled; the ill and immobile had no choice but to stay.

Malika directed the digging with a face haunted by exhaustion. Afterwards, she showed us around the home. The cavernous, Dickensian, kitchen was empty. The bedrooms, which might once have been pleasant retreats, now smelt of fear. Every occupant, propped up in bed, or shuffling around in slippers, was in a state of shock and grief. "I do what I can for them," Malika apologised. "And I ask advice from a Russian doctor, but I have very few drugs and only a little food."

With time and distance, impressions remain. Malika - smiling shyly as we said goodbye and pleading for medicines. The words of a neighbour who came up to us at that moment and said, "Come and look in any of the houses around here. They are all full of old, terrified people."

The world's press has focused almost exclusively on the destruction wrought to the centre of Grozny by Russian bombs. The heart of the city is indeed totally destroyed. In such a holocaust of dead trees, suffocating dust and smashed buildings, the bewildered, lost expressions on people's faces seem to be part of the madness.

But compared with other conflict areas, (Bosnia for example, where there is a plethora of aid agencies), the absence of NGOs in Grozny is astonishing. When MERLIN began its programme, only two other international medical aid agencies - the ICRC and MSF France and Belgium - were working in the city.



Harriet Logan

There are now around 280,000 people in Grozny and basic services are slowly starting to resume although essential supplies, of water, electricity and gas, are still limited or non-existent. MERLIN's work includes:

- support to five clinics in the south of the city and an outpatients' department
- preparation of a 100-bed ward in case of an outbreak of cholera or typhoid
- assistance to the Old People's Home
- supply of water to 50,000 people and assistance with sanitation

Yet how can just a score of expatriate aid workers and local medics care for the 100,000 or so vulnerable citizens who are beginning to crawl out of their cellars? Or the thousands of citizens who are starting to return?

The coming months will be grim. There is no gas or electricity in the city, not enough water for drinking, bathing or washing clothes. Many people are completely destitute. They are also sceptical about the sincerity of the international community to provide aid. During our visit to the old folks' home, one woman standing at the graveside asked us: "What are you doing here? Are you just coming to look and then going away?" It is a cry which is often addressed to aid workers. And it has a chilling connotation, for despite all their dedication, the NGO's ability to act depends on the donor community.

And who knows what political agendas are linked to discussions in Western Europe and America about whether or not to send help to Grozny - especially when it means assisting a former adversary, Russia, in a tragedy of her own making.



Events

Passion For Pink

A satirical look at the world of the English romantic novel was delivered by Theatre in Trust, in magnificent style. Passion for Pink attracted large audiences who were kept enthralled by scheming grandmothers, lost wills and destroyed reputations. The musical, by



Richard Ritchie and Sue Tilling, raised £21,000 for MERLIN and provided hundreds of people with a highly entertaining evening. MERLIN would like to thank all those who supported and took part in the musical.

Photographs by Father and Son

A private view of the photographs of George and Peter Rodger, father and son, was hosted by the blue gallery in June. The photographs included George Rodger's work amongst the Nuba in the Sudan and Peter Rodger's work in Yugoslavia. We would like to thank the artists who also kindly donated a photograph each to be raffled during the evening. Many thanks also to Giles and Susannah Baker at the blue gallery and to Diana Astor for her help. The event raised £2,500 towards the work of MERLIN.

Reaching the Summit

John Palmer, with his mountain bike at the top of Ben Nevis, had raised £4,000 towards a £8,400 goal by this point. He had already climbed two other peaks as part of a huge effort to raise funds for



children at the Ndoshu Orphanage in Zaire. Mr Palmer and Gillian Bell, who run the Helios Gallery in Birmingham, wanted to raise enough to cover the costs of building a home for the Ndoshu children. By the sale of donated pictures, organised events and sponsorship of the bike ride, they beat their target with more than £10,000 raised. Thank you to them both and to all of their supporters.

VE Day Celebrations

Landrover and satellite phone, doctors and emergency kits, descended on the VE Day celebrations in Hyde Park in May. Not to treat those overcome by the heat but to show the public how MERLIN is equipped to deal with emergencies abroad. We would like to thank The World Memorial Fund for enabling us to take part in the event.

A number of people have contributed to MERLIN's work, from opening their gardens for coffee mornings to cycling in the London Marathon. If you would like to host or organise an event for MERLIN, or take part in a sponsored event, Georgina Lee in the London office has details of how you can help. We appreciate all support.

Letter from Afghanistan

New health centres for Afghan women

Women in Kandahar, Afghanistan, could not even see a doctor; now they have their own health clinics, writes Rachael Tapsell, who spent six months living and working in the region.

As a woman, working in Kandahar has been a fascinating, if difficult, experience. Initially, the MERLIN team was refused access to Kandahar as the new government did not allow women to work and there was I, a female nurse, wanting to set up clinics in the region.

After nine hours spent outside the customs house (I was not allowed inside), in a car, covered from head to toe in a burqa, I had some idea of what working in Kandahar would mean. We finally reached an agreement: We could work, on condition that I respect and live by the restrictions faced by other women in Kandahar. This included wearing the burqa, a heavy, dark gown covering the body and with a fabric mesh across the eyes.

These conditions were not accepted lightly but without agreeing to them, the changes that we have made would not have been possible. Even so, I was far from happy about it. I was appalled by the burqa, by a regime that forces women to live this experience every day, isolating them and forcing them to withdraw so far from their environment that their opinions are never heard nor their views sought. However local women say it offers them freedom and security, which they have not enjoyed for many years.

Before MERLIN arrived, there was no health care for women in Kandahar and women could not be treated by male doctors. Ultimately, this meant that they would rather stay at home and die than face the dishonour of being seen by a male doctor.

Our priority, therefore, was to set up mother and child health clinics and to employ female doctors to see and treat female patients. Basic health education was also needed; the main causes of infant deaths in Afghanistan are common childhood diseases, which education and health awareness could prevent.

Since my arrival, we have managed to set up seven MERLIN mother and child health clinics to monitor child growth and provide education. We now employ 12 local women to work in our clinics; something which would have been impossible at the start of the programme. I was also, finally, given permission to leave my burqa at home. These successes have encouraged other agencies to start working here. And women can

now step forward and carry out the work they have been trained to do.

All this has had to be negotiated with the authorities. Sometimes, this has been difficult but I am sure that negotiating with me, a western female, has not been easy. They have been tolerant however and, on occasions, even humorous.

I still feel an abhorrence of the burqa. That a man would tell me to 'cover my face' before leaving an office or hospital has appalled and shamed me. When I felt this way, I tried to think of the women who live their entire lives like this. I remember the amazing opportunity I have had to share that existence for all but a short while. And I think about the changes we have seen and remember that we have been able to make a significant difference to these women's lives.



David Stewart-Smith

MERLIN's programme includes:

- Drug distribution to the main hospital and rehabilitation of a wing of the hospital
- Management of district clinics, with particular support to mother and child groups
- Teaching of local medical staff regarding diagnostic procedures and prevention of diseases

Volunteers

Many volunteers are now working on their second or third programme with MERLIN. Others have gone on to work in other regions but have kept in contact with us.

From Rwanda:

Marguerite Kaufman has been welcomed back in Rwanda, to work as a nurse in our health centres in Gisenye. Hazel Simpson has replaced MERLIN nurse Rachael Tapsell in Afghanistan - thankfully without burqa - and is joined by former team member, Nick Weatherill. Nick is administering the programme in Kandahar. Vincent Diamond is assisting our water and sanitation team in Grozny, Chechnya

Valerie Holmes is in the former Yugoslavia with the ICRC; so too is Jessica Barry, working with ICRC before travelling in the Caucasus; Henrietta Myers is with the Agha Khan Foundation in Pakistan; Jo Porter, in Britain, is about to be married.

From Siberia:

Valerie Powell has rejoined MERLIN in Chechnya, working as a nurse in the Grozny clinics. Medical logistics for this programme are being handled by Derek Tate, who has invaluable experience in the art of extracting MERLIN goods from Russian customs.

Jim Needell is back in Britain, working for Glaxo; Nick Ignatenko is working in British hospitals; and Maire Connelly is about to start with WHO in Geneva.

From Afghanistan:

Rachael Tapsell is keen to work in other areas in Afghanistan and is preparing evaluations in the north west of the country. Olivier Van Bunnan is back in the MERLIN office in London, temporarily taking over as director of operations.

Finally, from the London team

We are delighted to welcome Dr John Howarth, Dr Hussein Mursal and Moira McLure into operations. They bring a wealth of operational and medical expertise into the London core. However we were extremely sad to say goodbye to Julie Pereira who has worked long

and hard for MERLIN in the field. She is currently travelling in Ireland. Mark Dalton, director of operations, is taking a four-month sabbatical and Olivier Van Bunnan will direct operations in his absence. Angus Taverner, our Fundraiser, has been recalled by his regiment to assist in former Yugoslavia. Georgina Lee will be responsible for fundraising until his expected return in up to six months. We wish logistician David McCauley every happiness following his recent marriage, and welcome Stuart Shepherd into the department.