

FOUNDER'S MESSAGE 2019



Where do you start to help when people are so desperate that they risk their lives to make their voices heard? This is what happened in Sudan this year – a mass uprising of people crying for help for the very basics of life. Shortages even of bread, made people despair. Yet there was no violence from the demonstrators, despite being met at times by fatal attack. Their voice was heard. General Omer Bashir, who held Sudan in an iron grip for 30 years, has been deposed. There is now a civilian Prime Minister, and he is calling for help for his country. The country is destitute, its people are destitute. Those living in remote villages in Darfur have an income as little as £25 a year – less than tonight's ticket. How can they feed their children? How can they provide medicines when they are sick? There is no free health care, no free education. No wonder the people are calling for help. We cannot stand by and let children suffer, wherever they are. Every child matters – look at our wonderful children this evening.

Thankfully, for 18 years you have enabled Kids for Kids to help. For me it is a huge responsibility, and this is why I need your help. Mothers across Darfur watch helpless as their children die. But not in our villages. There are now 100 Kids for Kids' villages, over half a million people, to whom we have provided all the things that families have told us are the essentials to enable them to lift themselves out of abject poverty. Life in Darfur would be frighteningly basic for you and for me – our home, a hut built from straw - unable to mend or rebuild it when the crops fail. Water from a handpump at least half a mile away, wherever the drill has found a crevice to reach the water table underground. Up to an unbelievable 20 miles in the hottest months of summer. Walking for every drop. Our only transport, a little donkey. And the health of our children reliant on our crops. We would have no choice of food. We eat the same assida every single day, every single meal. I am dreading hearing what people will have to eat when they reach the 'hungry months' of summer. The coming months may be the hardest ever.

Our key project, our goat loans, provide not just proteins, minerals and vitamins from the milk from our goats and diversification when crops fail, - but they give women a livelihood. The most successful, after she has passed on kids to another family in need, has a flock of about 22 goats. All her own. Something unbelievable when a goat now costs £50 – remember their annual income. It is the road to a better, albeit, simple future. Give a Goat this Christmas and we give you a personalised Christmas Certificate – and you are giving a gift that transforms life for a child.

In Sudan natural disasters take many shapes. Not only is there a shocking lack of infrastructure because the previous government concentrated on defence and security,

neglecting the welfare of its people, but drought is now much more frequent. 18 years ago it was cyclical, every seven years, and people had coping mechanisms. Those have collapsed as drought becomes more frequent, and violence has taken its toll. There are pests such as locusts and rats that attack the crops, and disease threatens both flora and fauna. Mosquitoes have spread malaria, so that last month there were 8,000 people with malaria in hospital in El Fasher, the regional capital. Many more were unable to reach hospital.

Our aim has always been to prevent problems from becoming catastrophes. We provide two mosquito nets for each hut. I am told that those alone have reduced the incidence of malaria by two thirds in the villages. How about giving Mosquito nets for Christmas this year? Just £15 and you are giving life.

Our motto is ‘One goat at a time’- and every two years another family, and then another and another, reap the benefits of that one goat loan. Remember just £50! (So, a goat and a mosquito net?) It is the same with all our projects. Everything we do is sustainable – no not the buzz words you hear other charities using, but the real thing. Real measurable difference. And how do we know – well one leader walked 90 miles with his little donkey to come to tell me that every year, before Kids for Kids adopted his village, children had died needlessly, heartbreakingly, from malnutrition, malaria, infections which they could not withstand, because they were too weak - all preventable. He wanted me to know that not one child had died like this since we – since you – helped his village.

This year, a year when conditions have been the worst I have known, and with little prospect of improvement unless the international community steps in quickly, we have adopted **eight** more villages. We have trained **37 village midwives** who are back at home, saving lives. In October alone our midwives in **21** of our villages delivered **154 healthy babies**. They provided health care pre and post birth. They advised mothers, many of whom had virtually no education and cannot read or write, how to care for their newborns. And they teach women the dangers of female genital mutilation.

Ever since violence started in Darfur, travelling anywhere has been fraught with danger. With no health care in villages, many problems have gone untreated because of the dangers of travelling long distances. In our villages we also train first aid workers – it is not enough, but they make a real difference when there is no other health care within reach. Just **20 first aid workers** last month treated **214 people**. They also teach hygiene and because they are on hand, they prevent problems from escalating.

Nor is there is any veterinary care. When lives depend on the health of their animals, training paravets and providing veterinary drugs is one of the first things we introduce in every village we adopt. Last month our paravets saw **2,766 animals**. And we are building **five Kindergartens and five Health Units**. Despite the enormous difficulties created by the lack of fuel, the drilling rig has dug **five successful handpumps**, and there is clean water for another **1,250 people**.

So why is our big Appeal this Christmas, trees? You and I know from the news of drought and wildfires across the world, with soaring temperatures, and of exceptional rain even in our own country causing unprecedented floods, that climate change is a reality. In Darfur they are at the forefront, facing the encroaching desert – sand covering everything and even in every mouthful they eat, as the wind blows across the flat and increasingly barren land. This is the reality of the climate emergency, of life at the sharp end.

We have been planting trees wherever we can. When I first asked the village leaders if they wanted trees, they initially said No, because they attracted birds which would eat their crops. Now, with education, they are begging me for trees. Yet caring for them is challenging. When every drop of water has to be carried, often for miles, it is a labour of love, of optimism and of hope. To see a green canopy over straw huts, is a beautiful sight. To sit in the shade of a tree, when temperatures soar, is beyond price.

Please help me to plant more trees. If you are having a Christmas tree - even if it is one you bring out each year – please give a tree for a family in Darfur. You will love our Christmas Gift Certificates. We have them at the back of church. What a wonderful way to solve your Christmas present list right now! Off set your consumerism by giving back something life saving – whether it is a little goat, a donkey, mosquito net - or a tree.

Children, my friends, please don't go home and forget Darfur. There are families who need our help. Don't wait for the world to respond, let us help the helpless, together.

Happy Christmas everyone.

(Candle instructions)