

FOUNDER'S CHRISTMAS MESSAGE 2020



At last – we are celebrating my favourite time of year – Christmas, and all the happiness it brings. I know it has been a hard year, and my heart goes out to all those who have lost a loved one or who have struggled with Covid, or even are continuing to cope with the pain of Long Covid. But now we are together – not in the beautiful St Peter’s Church in London, but in our own homes. It means so much to me to know that all of you are here because of our shared determination to look after children. Whether they are close at hand or so far across the globe. To do our best to set right the injustices of this world, and to give children a helping hand to a better future.

I wish I could tell you that at last things are getting better in Darfur, but I can’t. This time last year people were struggling, despite the huge optimism after the overthrow of Omer Bashir. The transitional Government has indeed brought in new legislation to create a better future, but the years of corruption and mis-spending – combined with the lack of international investment while the US maintained sanctions – have left the country crippled by debt and facing desperate shortages in everything from fuel, to bread and even medicine. Everyone, whether in the capital, Khartoum, or in a small remote village, is facing hardship.

In the villages of Darfur, mothers are watching their children growing weak from malnutrition. Many children can no longer attend school because there is no money to pay for it. Without the money to pay for drugs, malaria goes untreated. 60,000 people have malaria in Darfur right now. Other fatal diseases go unchecked – chickungunya, dengue – both spread by mosquitoes, with the risks of further outbreaks growing. Even polio is spreading again because of inadequate vaccinations. Inflation – which was a shocking 166% this time last year, is now an unbelievable 212%. How can anyone budget?

But it is Christmas! Surely there should be good news?

Well – there is! We have not stopped helping – and thanks to you, our wonderful, loyal, and generous friends, we have been able to extend life-saving assistance to hundreds more families.

In February my son and I went to Darfur at last after being prevented from doing so for 9 long years. Thinking about it even now brings tears to my eyes. Of course I had been kept up to date with the minutiae of all we do – real sustainability depends on keeping on top of the detail – but to see our Kindergartens in real life, and to talk to the children who go to them – well, that was unforgettable. I wish you could have been with us. At every village, crowds were waiting to tell us what a difference we had made to the lives of each and everyone of them. And it was even more overwhelming in Um Ga’al – our very first village where Ibrahim lives, the little 9 year old whose walk across the desert for water inspired me to start Kids for Kids twenty years ago, in 2001. Over 1000 people waited to welcome us. And with them was that small boy – grown taller than Alastair now and with his own

children. His eldest son is at our Kindergarten. There are no words to express how I felt, how he felt. So many lives have been changed because of that one small boy and his walk for water.

And what have we done to help this year. You all know about our Soap Appeal. Its impact is immense, truly saving lives. There is no medical help for ordinary villagers. We went to the main hospital at Mellit. The people who work there do their best, but how can a doctor care for a patient when there is no oxygen, with a broken stethoscope, no blood pressure gauges? I could go on. Someone with Covid has no chance.

Our aim has always been to do all we can to stop problems from becoming catastrophes. Our soap has done just that. Every family in all our 105 villages has been given 5 bars of soap each. We know that soap breaks down the membrane of the virus. Incidence of Covid in our villages has been much less than feared. The logistics of getting over 500,000 bars of soap to Darfur during lockdown took quite some doing! But we did it! Thank you Hatim and our friends in Khartoum. I'm delighted that one benefit of doing this event online is that you are able to join us from Sudan.

Of course that first delivery is only the start. Whilst Covid remains a threat we will keep on with our Soap Appeal.

But there is more. We are not an emergency organisation. 270 more families now have a donkey. We have provided 1,440 goats so far this year. There are more to come. Children in those 270 families have blankets to cuddle up under at night, and mothers in 20 more villages know that childbirth will be so much safer for them thanks to 40 new midwives. We have provided veterinary care in our new villages by training paravets and providing veterinary drugs.

You may have read of the disastrous floods in Sudan? Many families lost all they owned. The most urgent need was for jerry cans to carry water, so we provided 500. And the aftermath of the floods has left vast areas of standing water – breeding ground for mosquitoes. We have already provided 2,356 mosquito nets this year and 3,000 more are on their way. And what of the future? Well, whilst you are thinking of your Christmas trees, in Darfur we have planted 10,000 tree seedlings, and are working on establishing 3 new community forests. The future will be green in Darfur.

Kids for Kids is certainly not slowing down. Far from letting the restrictions caused by Covid curtail our activities, we now have two wonderful new fundraisers, Charlotte and Anna, doing all they can to persuade you to buy more goats! Lucy has just become my PA and is starting in January. And I would like to thank their predecessors, Sage and Sarah, for all they have done to enable Kids for Kids to make such a difference. Mary Jane, our volunteer in America, despite herself suffering from Long Covid, continues to make sure our friends in the United States are kept up to date with our news.

I am so touched you are here this evening – and it's all thank to our wonderful Queen's Gate School – and to Ros Kamaryc, Headteacher for her support. Thank you girls for your beautiful singing.

Our exciting new team has already started work on our 20th Anniversary celebrations. It is hard to believe that we will be celebrating our 20th birthday next year. Please will you plan a party or event too and help introduce us to new friends? We all deserve to celebrate after this year – and what could be a better excuse than celebrating what Kids for Kids continues to do to change the lives of children who need us so much. Let's make 2021 a year to remember.

Happy Christmas everyone!

Patricia Parker MBE, Founder & Chairman of Trustees