

Patricia Parker OBE - FOUNDER'S CHRISTMAS MESSAGE 2023

Our screens and newspapers are full of the horrors of the events unfolding in Israel and Palestine. I expect, like me, you are feeling huge sadness, anger and frustration at our inability to stop such violence. But I suspect that each day you are not reading of the appalling murders, rapes and destruction in the very capital of Sudan, and in Darfur. This is what is happening in Sudan, but the world has shut its eyes. The UN has called it, despite Palestine and Ukraine, the “worst humanitarian disaster in the world today”. Man’s inhumanity to man is unimaginable to me and I cannot bear it.

The violence and extreme politics overtaking the world is not so far from us either. Our Trustee Khalid Al Mekki had just said Goodnight to his daughter at their home in Khartoum. She started upstairs, and a stray bullet shot through the window and hit the stairs between her legs. High calibre bullets travel 3 miles. It was a stroke of luck that she was not killed. The Rapid Support Force is being armed by the UAE. The army by Egypt. Clear violations of the UN arms embargo. Yet there is no outcry.

The three key people in Khartoum who keep Kids for Kids out of politics and ensure that our funds are safeguarded, have all had to flee their homes. Those homes, which are so similar to where you and I live, are now taken over by the Rapid Support Force. The army is shelling civilian houses. Houses like ours. My friends have nothing left. No homes to return to. Over 7 million people have fled Sudan. But many cannot flee.

In Darfur, women and children face guns and rape. Many are being taken as slaves. African men are rounded up and slaughtered by Arab militia. There is evidence of mass graves. Human rights organisations are appealing to the world to urgently stop these crimes against humanity.

I am sure you hear this terrible news and feel helpless. We believe nothing can stop the horrific path of destruction. But is there anything we can do?

I believe there is. We can, and should, write to the Government, through our MP, to demand action.

I also believe that if we can save just one child then we have helped. Because that little child, like every one of these wonderful children here tonight, is loved. And yes, we can indeed save that child.

You will know that violence started in 2002, two short years after we had started Kids for Kids. Now those same horrendous forces are rampaging across the region. But through everything, Kids for Kids quietly persisted in transforming lives on a day to day basis in villages across Darfur. Today there are 110 Kids for Kids villages – well over half a million people helped to stay in their homes, their children going to school. Right now, a young woman is struggling to give birth. But she is not alone. Healthcare has virtually collapsed across Sudan but, in our villages, there is a midwife standing by, trained and skilled. That mother in a remote village of straw huts will live because you have helped us fund midwives in every one of our villages. Her baby will live, because of the milk provided by our

little goats. They will have water, brought by our donkeys, from our handpump close by – and that handpump bears the name of someone you love.

Amazingly in the midst of such violence and challenges, out of the gaze of the world's media, our villages are growing. Families are seeking the help of our midwives. When their animals need veterinary care, our paravets are helping. Although government schools across the region are closed, our kindergartens are open and welcomed 1,000 children in September.

When I was in Darfur, a village leader said to me “We have given up hope in the international community, but not in Kids for Kids. You are there for us.” In all the 23 years since Alastair and I founded Kids for Kids, despite all the challenges, we have found ways to provide life-saving, long-term help to the most deprived families in the world. We are not giving up now.

Last year at this time I told you that the World Health Organisation had warned that a third of the population across Sudan would face starvation. In Darfur there were floods in August. There was no spraying of standing water, and mosquitoes swarmed. Last year there were 4 children in every hospital bed, suffering from malaria. Many died because they were malnourished and could not fight the disease. This year there are more mosquitoes. But this year there are no children in the hospital beds, because healthcare across the country has collapsed. Thankfully our policy has been to provide mosquito nets to all of our villages, and to every village that asks us for help. I have lost count of the thousands of mosquito nets alone that we have provided.

It's the personal stories that affect me the most, not statistics. I think of Ibrahim – that young man whom we first met when he was just 9 years old, 23 years ago, struggling to carry a jerry can on a walk for water. It took him 7 hours to reach that handpump. Every drop of water for his family collected by that one little boy. And I think of Ibrahim's little son, who is now at our kindergarten in their remote village. Thanks to us, thanks to you, he will have a future.

We have always adopted as many villages as we can each year. I had chosen five villages to adopt this year just as the violence between the two generals erupted. We will adopt those villages as soon as we can. We need the funds now though so that we can be ready.

The immediate need is urgent life-saving aid. Khalid, our Trustee, is now in Port Sudan. He and our Project Manager are coordinating our volunteers in Darfur. Yes, despite all their fears for their own families, they are determined to continue to help. We have sorghum, mosquito nets, jerry cans, veterinary drugs and spare parts for handpumps in warehouses right now. They are going to 16 of our villages. Then we will target 16 more. All our 110 Kids for Kids villages need us right now. The children and people there need your help.

And the exciting thing is that everything you provide, Joanna has promised to double. There are no words to thank her – what a blessing to have such an amazing Patron. I also thank Davina, Charlotte and Becca who, like me, are ready and waiting to send your Christmas Presents for you. Who wouldn't like a little goat, or a lumpy parcel of spare parts for a handpump, on Christmas morning! But don't worry – your eagerly awaited parcels will be smart Christmas Certificates – your goat will be nibbling grass outside a little hut in Darfur.

I appeal to each of you – please become a regular giver. If you can, could you become a Children’s Champion? You choose your projects and commit to three years. That enables me to plan – and not to let down the poorest people in the world. Tell anyone you meet how they can help too. The need is off the spectrum. The world is not listening. But you are!

You know about Ibrahim, the little boy who inspired all this. What an impact that one child has had! Please support us throughout the year ahead. You might challenge yourselves and get sponsorship – grandparents are very generous! Have you thought of a Walk for Water? Though I am not suggesting you walk for seven hours - *and* back again. But that is what that little 9 year old had to do, every day. If each of us here right now does one thing, just one thing, the impact will be huge. I did step ups last month! Please tell the world of the violence in Darfur, tell them that after all, we are not helpless – those children need our – your – help, right now.

May I wish you all a very Happy Christmas.

In the midst of darkness, let us bring light to the world.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Patricia". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single blue line.

Founder