

Sentinelles

To the rescue of wounded innocence



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Editorial

Access to health, a never-ending battle

There have been encouraging developments in health in Africa in recent years. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), life expectancy at birth has increased significantly, and advances in the fight against infectious diseases have undoubtedly contributed to this. However, there are considerable disparities between people in urban and rural areas, those with high and low incomes, and those with universal health coverage and a total lack of protection.

The health issue in the west of the continent remains of great concern. Droughts and floods are more frequent and severe than before, leading to humanitarian crises. Low-level conflicts are on the rise, with indirect victims due to food shortages and lack of access to basic services.

The density of health infrastructure is low, especially in rural areas, and the barriers to access are sometimes insurmountable. The shortage of medicines and qualified personnel, and administrative red tape, complete this unpromising overview of appropriate medical care for the poorest sections of society. Reaching a health facility is therefore only the first step on the tortuous road to medical care. Many people simply give up, with disastrous long-term consequences. While others face major obstacles in accessing care, the disease makes insidious progress.

Little Pathe personifies this profound injustice. His health could probably have been safeguarded if he had received medical treatment in time. Today, he is fighting for his life with a facial tumour.

You will read about other children who encounter Dr. Baillet, a surgeon who is strongly committed to our cause. In Madagascar, it is sometimes the technical equipment that is lacking. For example, Nadia, who suffers from a spinal deformity, has come to Geneva University Hospitals for treatment that is not yet feasible in her country.

When health systems are under pressure for budgetary reasons, when health centres in insecure areas are deserted, getting treatment becomes a never-ending battle, a battle that we are fighting with Pathe, Nadia and so many other children and women deprived of the essentials. Thank you for helping us to support them.



Marlyse Morard
Directrice

Burkina Faso

Smiles restored

Sentinelles is grateful to continue its collaboration with Dr. Aissata Baillet, a surgeon specialising in cleft lip and palate surgery. Together with her NGO, 'Pour la Promotion de la Chirurgie Réparatrice' (PPCR) (Promoting Corrective Surgery), we organise two to three trips per year to Ouagadougou, performing an average of 30 operations per trip. Babies as young as three months old are able to benefit from a free operation to close their cleft, allowing them to eat and, at a later stage, to speak properly, with a full smile restored to their face. We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to Dr. Baillet who is tireless in her continuing commitment to the children of Burkina Faso.



Switzerland

The enthusiastic Concert of the Ministrings

A huge thank you to these talented young musicians who offered the numerous audience magnificent musical moments on Sunday 5 March. Of course, we cannot forget Tina Strinning, founder of this ensemble, and Baiju Bhatt who joined her in 2013. Many thanks also to Didier Nkebereza, director of the Centre culturel des Terreaux (Lausanne) and his team, who graciously welcomed us. We are also grateful for the generosity of the public, which enabled us to raise CHF 3454, all of which will be used to help children who are in deep distress.





Niger

Film animation helping in the fight against noma

In collaboration with Studio Obelus Film & Animation in Dakar, the Sentinelles Foundation is pleased to present Noma, an animated short film that aims to raise awareness of noma among children and adults. The production of this film in French and Hausa was supported by the BCV-Solidarité prize. It will be broadcast in Niger as well as on the internet and social networks.

The film tells the story of Amina, a little Nigerien girl who wakes up one day with a swollen right cheek and bleeding gums. Her condition worsens

and those around her reject her until the nurse in her village finds a way to treat her.

To view the French version of this brilliant six-minute short film, simply scan the QR code or copy the following link into your browser. Enjoy the film!

<https://www.sentinelles.org/media/multimedia/>



Columbia

Support for progress

In 1987, the reason for Sentinelles' arrival in Antioquia, Colombia was child labour in the coal mines. For the next thirty years, we fought side by side with other social movements to rescue the children from this exhausting and dangerous work. This commitment has helped to raise awareness and bring the matter to the attention of the government. Today, child labour is at a much lower level. Figures show that, of 100 families supported by Sentinelles, only between 3 and 5 still have youngsters (13-15 years old) working in the mine, although most

of these families remain economically dependent on this activity. Most of the men continue to work in the mines, risking their lives for a pittance.

During 2022, the region's inclusive education unit identified a large number of children whose learning potential is below the norm for their age group. It is difficult for them to learn at school, to interact and to assimilate the rules governing life in a community. In order to respond to this problem, Tierra de Vida (Sentinelles' name in Colombia) decided to offer educa-

tional support to 17 children from the primary school closest to the Centre. This support is aimed at minors with learning difficulties who have no supportive adult to monitor their homework. Two meals a day are also provided for each participant.

The cost of this school and food support is CHF 200 per child per year. It enables the children to develop their potential and to look forward to the future with confidence.

Thank you for your support!



Madagascar Nadia's spinal surgery

Nadia, a 13-year-old girl from Madagascar, was admitted to our treatment programme in Switzerland. This is quite exceptional, as the children Sentinelles brings to Switzerland for treatment often come from West African countries and suffer mainly from the after-effects of noma.

The treatment programme in Madagascar is mainly intended for children suffering from congenital malformations, mostly bone defects, or the after-effects of accidents. Operations are performed locally during international surgical visits or by specialists from the capital's hospitals. Children whose parents lack the means to have them treated are generally referred to us by doctors who know about our activities.

Nadia has a spinal deformity. When we met her at the age of 9, she had a lump in her back and was often ill with a chronic cough. Before we met her, she was often in and out of hospital, but the hump kept getting bigger and her mother, who could no longer afford to pay for the treatment, was looking for help. One of the people

around her, who knew about Sentinelles pointed her in our direction.

She was soon referred to several specialists and underwent various tests. At this point, the possibility that she had tuberculosis of the bones (Pott's disease) was raised. After weeks of consultations, examinations and theories, tuberculosis was finally ruled out and Nadia was referred to neurosurgery where she was diagnosed with severe kyphoscoliosis. The doctor noticed that the malformation was progressing, but he could not identify the source of the disease. He immediately thought that a medical evacuation would be necessary to further investigate and perform surgery, which the resources available in Madagascar do not allow. While waiting for this opportunity, Nadia wore a corset and underwent back and respiratory physiotherapy at Sentinelles' office.

Following this initial diagnosis, a period of time elapsed between the search for solutions and the Covid-19 pandemic, which greatly slowed down our activi-

ties and caused the closure of borders for many months. Nadia was then 11 years old and her doctor in the neurosurgery department noticed that the malformation was getting worse and might cause her chronic pain or even leave her paraplegic.

After a number of attempts, Geneva University Hospitals (HUG) agreed to accept Nadia. She underwent examinations and free surgery in the paediatric orthopaedics department. When she arrived in Switzerland at the end of October 2022, accompanied by volunteers from 'Aviation sans Frontières', the examinations and consultations carried out at the HUG only served to confirm the complexity of Nadia's scoliosis, which might also have serious consequences on her lung capacity. This may explain the chronic coughing. In addition to the orthopaedic department, she is monitored by pulmonologists because of her operation.

The strategy proposed by the doctors, which was the safest from a neurological point of



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view, was an initial operation to put in place a cranial halo which she would have for four weeks, followed by surgery to straighten her spine.

The surgery entailed neurological risks (paraplegia) because the spinal cord is stretched when the spine is straightened.

The halo reduces this risk and improves the correction. The halo is a ring that is attached to the skull at several points by means of pins. A cord connects the halo to weights, which may be up to 50% of the patient's body weight, by means of a pulley. This treatment, which is closely monitored and requires hospitalisation throughout, stretches the spine and spinal cord for several weeks in preparation for the spondylodesis surgery. This procedure aims to fix the vertebrae together or 'fuse' them with hardware to stop their movement.

For Nadia, this halo treatment meant a month in hospital, including a week in

bed, without her parents, in a country where everything was alien to her, with this equipment pulling on her head 24 hours a day. Despite this, Nadia remained a smiling and cheerful girl, facing the treatment with great courage.

Fortunately, she was well supported by the medical team, the Sentinelles volunteers and, above all, by the tremendous Malagasy solidarity that kept her company during her period in hospital and supported her. During Nadia's first few days in Switzerland, we were faced with a language problem in order to explain everything the doctors were going to do. We therefore contacted Malagasy people living in Switzerland to interpret for us and visit her from time to time. In the end, a whole team of Nadia's compatriots took turns to spend time with her every day during lunch breaks or after work. Many thanks to them.

The delicate operation went smoothly in December. The spine was significantly straightened, and Nadia gained several centimetres in height. Thanks to this

operation, she will be able to live a normal life, without a corset, rehabilitation sessions or any other constraints. While waiting for the final checks to ensure that her spine had been strengthened, she stayed at the Terre des hommes Valais House with other children who had come to Switzerland for treatment.

Nadia was able to return to Madagascar to her family in February.



Congo

Iragi, a young carpenter turned breadwinner

For nearly 30 years, the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo has been under attack from armed gangs of all kinds, particularly the Interahamwe, Rwandan militias based in the forests of South Kivu since the end of the 1994 genocide. Villages are looted and burned, men are massacred and women are raped and subjected to other forms of violence. Although the war is officially over, insecurity persists, particularly in the North-East and South Kivu regions. It is in this frightening context that Iragi grew up. Iragi is the eldest child of a family living in a small village in South Kivu. Since 2015, this family has been taken care of by Sentinelles. At the time, Iragi was only 15 years old and in his fourth year of primary school.

His siblings, three boys and two girls, were growing up in very difficult conditions. Their father, who was already not around a great deal, sank into alcoholism and abandoned his family. He spent all his earnings on alcohol, soon becoming destitute. He then returned to drive the family out of their home, so that he could sell the plot and the house. The young children and their mother left to live in another village, with relatives on their mother's side. Their mother struggled alone to provide for her children.

Iragi, however, stayed with his father. Still a pre-teen, he took responsibility as the eldest child. He was determined to dissuade his father from selling the family home. This was the only prop-

erty the family still owned, as there was not even any furniture left. Iragi somehow managed to do this until his father died a few years later.

His mother, brothers and sisters returned home. However, the house was in an advanced state of disrepair, having not been maintained for several years. In addition, the children of school age were regularly ejected from school for failing to pay their fees.

It was at this point that Sentinelles met Iragi's family and decided to help them.

As a first step, the house was rebuilt to ensure the safety of its occupants. At the same time, Sentinelles' social workers sorted out school enrolment for all the children so that they could return to school immediately. The mother received coaching to improve the returns from her economic activity. Finally, they all receive medical care.

At the end of his schooling, Iragi was not sure which path he wanted to follow. After learning about the different options and with the guidance of our team, he chose to train as a carpenter. In November 2021, Iragi registered at the Confédération Monde des Artisans (Confederation of Craft Workers) in Bukavu. Sentinelles provided him with all the necessary materials for his



apprenticeship. He was very diligent, learned quickly, and was highly thought of by his trainer and the managers at the training centre. He soon began making stools, which he sold in his village and gave to his family to furnish their home.

When he finished his training at the end of 2022, Iragi received a complete carpentry kit to start his business. He built a workbench on his own in the family plot where he planned to carry out his work.

In order to continue to support Iragi, Sentinelles has chosen him as the official carpenter for the manufacture of

rabbit hutches for other beneficiaries. Some of the women in the families we support are not able to work in shops and want to raise their own rabbits, chickens, pigs or goats.

By making the hutches, Iragi creates links with the other beneficiaries and helps them in his own way. In addition to the work he does in his workshop, he goes to the Confédération Monde des Artisans where he works on his own account making parts that require specific tools. In addition, his professional activity allows him to help his mother in the fields on a regular basis.

The current situation in South Kivu is still uncertain and insecure. Solidarity between beneficiaries and within the families themselves is essential for their survival. Because of the high level of insecurity, the inhabitants tend to become separated from each other. This is why Sentinelles tries as much as possible to maintain links between the people it supports. Iragi is now a great help to his family and other beneficiaries. Iragi and his mother will soon be able to support themselves and become independent. A great example of ambition and success.



Switzerland

Jacqueline, a Sentinelle in the basement!

Jacqueline is one of the friendly and valuable volunteers working to promote the Sentinelles Foundation's permanent archive.

After studying sociology at the University of Geneva and obtaining a certificate at the 'Institut universitaire d'études du développement' (Graduate Institute of Development Studies) (now IHEID), she obtained her doctorate many years later with a thesis written at the University of Fribourg.

Her professional life began after secretarial school. She worked for three years in an NGO, first as a secretary and then as a coordinator for the evaluation of community development projects in Madagascar, various countries in sub-Saharan Africa and in South America.

After various assignments related to sociology—including studies on violence against women within couples—she joined the 'Unité de médecine des violences' (Violence Medicine Unit) at the 'Centre hospitalier universitaire vaudois' (CHUV) (Vaud University Hospital), where she carried out research until her retirement.

We give her the floor to explain her work and the joy she finds in it:

"Every Thursday I go back in time and travel to distant countries. This happens in the basement of Sentinelles' Lausanne headquarters, where I am one of the volunteer archive assistants.

After retiring as a research officer at the CHUV and several months of partial lockdown, I spotted an ad in benevol-jobs.ch: 'Sentinelles seeks archive assistants'. The aims and activities of the Foundation motivated me to get involved. The good atmosphere and the friendliness around the team and the volunteers made me want to continue.

My job is to help preserve the memory of field activities. The early years of the Foundation, when Edmond Kaiser was still alive, are already documented in the Vaud Cantonal Archives. With the help of my colleagues, who are volunteers like me, I fill in index cards summarising the contents of several hundred binders and boxes of archives dating mainly from the last 20 years. Is it boring reading? On the contrary, it is absolutely fascinating,

because it is about each child, each family followed over several years. It is moving to understand how life has not been kind to them, but how much of a difference long-term, personalised support makes."

Would you like to join Sentinelles as a volunteer?

Please contact us (by phone or email: info@sentinelles.org).

We are looking for people who are willing to help us run stands at exhibitions or concerts as well as various other works.

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