

# Newsletter

Issue 8, Fall 2011

MERLIN

## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friend,

It has been a busy year since I joined Merlin last January. I thank you for your continued support and your interest in the care we provide to millions of people around the world. I hope this newsletter gives you a glimpse of the work we are doing in 15 countries throughout Africa, Asia and the Americas.

This past summer I was able to see firsthand Merlin teams in action when I traveled to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). In the DRC, Merlin works closely with the Ministry of Health to supplement care the government is not able to provide. The challenges are many. War has destroyed both the physical infrastructure and the financial means to supply necessary medical treatment. In the fragile peace, Merlin supports 200 health facilities with much needed services and expertise. With Merlin's training and support of health care workers, I can honestly say people are surviving medical conditions that once would have proved deadly.



*In Kindu Hospital with Merlin logisticians*

In Kindu, in the Maniema Province, I witnessed Merlin's work supporting the Kindu Hospital. When I was there, 2-3 children (plus their mothers) were sharing a bed in an overcrowded pediatric ward. Merlin is providing medicines, equipping the pediatric ward with much needed beds, and working with the hospital administrator to make sure that personnel are trained and paid for the work that they do.

Malnourishment is a countrywide issue and at Kindu Hospital Merlin helps to ensure children get the nutrition they need to survive. Parents receive nutrition training so that when families leave the hospital, mothers and fathers are better equipped to care for their children. You might think this ward would be a somber place, but it was one area of the hospital that was full of singing children, led by the nurses and their parents.

Throughout my trip, I saw Merlin work in partnership with the Ministry of Health to support the people. Merlin trained personnel distributed medicines and provided basic care. I saw midwives treating mothers, and when appropriate, referring them to a hospital. I saw new health facilities built with Merlin's help, and I cannot count the ways Merlin's staff supports local communities. I witnessed dedicated Merlin professionals working all hours of the day and night with limited resources.

My trip to the DRC showed me Merlin's profound impact on global health care. Our work has taken on even greater importance as we address the famine crisis in East Africa. Famine is always more than just a food crisis; it is a medical emergency on a grand scale. In East Africa malnutrition, pastoralism, armed conflict, and the flight of refugees have undermined the health of over 12 million people with deadly diseases. In partnership with governments, Merlin has taken the lead to provide health care throughout the region. For most of the summer, Merlin was one of a few agencies able to access insecure areas of South Central Somalia. We have established health and nutrition programs in remote areas of northwest Turkana, Kenya, and we continue to operate mobile clinics in Ethiopia.

I ask that you continue to help those most affected in East Africa - help provide emergency care, nutrition programs, vaccinations, and specialized care for children and new mothers. As an organization, we are focused on improving the health and well being of all in the famine zone.

Our strength is helping people help themselves. With your ongoing support, you directly help a mother and child live a healthy life, and a nurse or pharmacist provide much needed services to their community.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Theresa Pike Rhodes'.

Theresa Pike Rhodes  
Executive Director

# GETTING THE MERLIN MESSAGE OUT THERE

Written by Sarah Kennedy

Tim Butcher, journalist, best-selling author of books about Africa, and Ambassador to Merlin, was in the United States in October promoting his second book, *Chasing the Devil* (about his trek through Sierra Leone and Liberia). Merlin capitalized on his visit through a series of events to tell audiences more about Merlin's work in Africa. Merlin would like to thank Board member, Helen Mumford Sole, volunteer, Margaret Anker and law firms, Paul Hastings and Dewey LeBoeuf for hosting the events.



*From left: Helen Mumford Sole, Tim Butcher, and Linda Doull at the Yale Club, NYC*

Occasionally, spreading the word about Merlin requires a two-way conversation. That was the aim of our busy information week across Manhattan via Old Greenwich, CT, down to Washington, DC. We were lucky enough to have Merlin's Director of Health and Policy, Linda Doull, to accompany Tim on a hectic week of events. We were able to reach out to many new friends, including readers of the Christian Science Monitor and an interview at CBS radio, which reaches 70 million people a week in the USA through its local partners.

The highlight of the week was a Merlin lunch on October 17th at the Yale Club, NYC, for invited friends and information

gatherers in the city. During the lunch, Helen Mumford Sole chaired a discussion with Linda and Tim about Merlin's work in Africa, with the floor thrown open for questions afterwards. While Linda enlightened our guests on how effective Merlin's efforts have been in Liberia and the DRC, Tim was able to paint us his own artist's impression of the backdrop to Merlin's work on the African continent.

Tim surprised us with a candid confession about seeking help at a Merlin office in the DRC and being turned away. Footsore and weary from a hard day's trek, he was politely told there were no facilities to help him at what was, in fact, a women's center. Tim told us that he realized then just how much Merlin's activities are focused on the people they aim to help. Resources are extremely limited when it comes to covering the vast area of the DRC. In some regions, explained Linda, medicines can take two

days to arrive because the only route into a region is a footpath. This means quantities are limited and everyone at Merlin's health centers and clinics works with the bare minimum of resources. Nothing spare for journalists or tourists, said Linda, no matter how needy!

With Helen's guidance, questions from the audience broadened the information available to all at our lunch. To the question: How can we progress forward when aid workers seem to be ever more in peril these days? Linda explained that more diplomacy and integration is needed in Africa to further local understanding of aid efforts, and this is at the core of Merlin's work there. In the Congo and Liberia, Merlin's aim has been to set up independent and locally run health care systems.

Our guests left us with a greater understanding of Merlin's work in Africa and a sense of joint purpose.



*Mark Dalton, one of the founders of Merlin, talks with Tim Butcher and Linda Doull*

## MERLIN ALWAYS BRINGS HOPE

Merlin's Emergency Response Team is the first on the ground after an emergency, assessing the needs and giving emergency health care. The emergency team was there in Haiti after the earthquake, in Pakistan after the flood that affected over 17 million, and is now in East Africa, to help those suffering in the food crisis.

Team members are working constantly in the most remote areas of Somalia, Ethiopia, and Kenya. David Sims, the Logistician for the Team writes from northwest Turkana, Kenya:

"Conditions due to the East Africa Food Crisis are still very bad here. This is the worst drought the region's people have faced in living memory."

Millions are at risk - and we know that around 37% of the local population is acutely malnourished. But things are improving - Merlin is having a real impact and the numbers are starting to go down.

Merlin is here - we absolutely have to be. We've set up an emergency feeding program and are rehabilitating Lochichar Stabilization Center where families can come for diagnosis and

treatment. The Center is ideally located, but consists of four bare concrete block walls, a tin roof and nothing more. There's no flooring, no patient seating, no weighing scales or equipment. It's half-finished and far from hygienic. There's so much to do.

Merlin always brings hope. After assessing children's needs, we often start by giving them a packet of Plumpy'Nut®, a nutritionally dense supplement

recommended for use in these extreme situations by the World Health Organization. We're rehabilitating the Lochichar Stabilization Center - as soon as possible, so we can treat children who are severely malnourished and have complications (like other diseases such as malaria). These children need specialized care 24 hours a day. And this is what Merlin will provide by specially trained nurses."



*David giving blood, on his emergency response assignment to Liberia*



### SUPPORT TO MERLIN GOES A LONG WAY

**\$15** buys a medical kit for a community midwife, including basic drugs and medical supplies

**\$25** feeds a critically malnourished child for a month

**\$50** buys enough MUAC bands (a simple color coded band to measure Middle Upper Arm Circumference), to help a Merlin health worker diagnose acute malnutrition in over 550 children

Please visit [www.merlinusa.org](http://www.merlinusa.org) to find out how you can help.  
Merlin never forgets that you, our supporters, are the vital link in the chain.

**Thank you for all your support**



## GLOBAL UPDATE

### Merlin in Pakistan

Merlin has been in Pakistan since launching an emergency response following the Kashmir earthquake in October 2005. In the summer of 2010 Monsoon rains caused catastrophic floods over an area the size of New England and half of New York. The floods killed thousands and affected over 20 million people. Merlin was one of the first agencies to respond to the crisis. The flooding destroyed an estimated 558 health facilities and impacted one third of the nations' 100,000 Lady Health Workers, who are crucial to providing much-needed health care to Pakistan's rural women.

This year the Monsoon returned in force, and Marco Aviotti, Merlin's Country Director notes many of the people suffering through this year's flooding are



*Doctor Sakina treats Mamal Haider in the Bauto District Hospital in Thatta, Sindh, Pakistan*

*Photo © Sam Phelps, 2011*

already "in dire need, having lost homes, livelihoods, and

loved ones in last year's floods. The lack of food has left women, children and the elderly even more susceptible to disease."

Facing the triple threat of waterborne diseases, malaria, and malnutrition, Merlin supports 110 health facilities across 8 districts, and has redoubled its efforts in the disaster zone, sending fifteen additional mobile health teams into areas where the destruction has made communication and the movement of supplies next to impossible.

Since the flooding began Merlin has treated hundreds of thousands of new patients, and expanded into the provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Sindh with more than 100 health teams and a national staff numbering 2,100.



### Merlin in Libya

The situation in Libya has been fluid and fast moving. When civil war broke out in Libya, Merlin crisis teams responded. Our medical experts, doctors, nurses, and paramedics have worked in the Nafusa Mountains on the border with Tunisia and traveled to the eastern deserts, which saw some of the fiercest fighting. Our mobile surgical teams in Nalut, Jado, and Cabo provided emergency care for any Libyan in need.

Nigel Young, Merlin's Head of Emergencies says: "The changing circumstances within Libya at the moment mean that health agencies like Merlin now have access to a much larger number of people inside the country

who were completely cut off from even basic health services during the war."

Tens of thousands of Libyans and immigrant workers have been directly affected by the fighting. Sarah Ireland from Merlin's Emergency Response Team reports, "We are seeing huge numbers of people displaced from their homes or injured by the fighting inside Libya settling in refugee camps in southern Tunisia or the mountains of western Libya."

With the death of Colonel Gaddafi and the declaration of a National Liberation Day, Merlin is working



*Merlin supported paramedics train local health workers in CPR*

*Photo © Jenny Matthews, 2011*

with the Libyan Ministry of Health to repair destroyed medical infrastructure, re-establish supply chains, and train medical professionals while providing other health care support.

## EAST AFRICA FOOD CRISIS - MERLIN'S RESPONSE

The famine in East Africa has rolled like a wave across some of the world's poorest and most vulnerable countries. With over 12 million people at risk, Merlin has responded to the humanitarian crisis. Merlin provides food, emergency care, training, medical, and nutritional support for peoples in need.

### In Somalia

In Somalia, the heart of the famine crisis, over four million people, or roughly half of the country's population, now need humanitarian support. Merlin's response has been focused, effective, and has saved lives. Merlin's Chief Executive Carolyn Miller asserts: "This is not a short-term crisis and we are committed to staying on as long as it takes to address the country's severe health needs."

More needs to be done. Merlin is in the process of a dramatic expansion in the number of health facilities, from 24 to 44 by the end of 2011, with the total standing at 30 by the end of October. Similarly, Merlin is more than tripling its effort to provide services outside facilities by increasing the number of outreach sites from currently 20 sites to 70 sites by the end of 2011, reaching tens of thousands of men, women, and children who are unable to travel to often remote facilities.

In addition to food and basic medical care, we continue to provide vaccinations for measles, diphtheria, whooping cough and tetanus for thousands of children, all while making a special effort to support young mothers and pregnant women with health screenings.

Merlin's Country Director in Somalia Louise Patterson writes that Somalia "has been called Hell's Kitchen due to the scorching temperatures and drought in the country." The environmental catastrophe combined with years of armed combat has made the country dangerous both for its citizens and those trying to help.



*Mothers and their children receiving care from Merlin in Ethiopia*

Merlin continues to be one of the only authorized organizations working in the conflict zone and hundreds of thousands of people depend on the crisis care Merlin provides.

### In Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, the government's preparation supported by an early intervention of non-profits like Merlin has prevented the famine's worst depredations. Still, over 700,000 Ethiopians are at risk of starvation, 4.5 million people need healthcare and nutrition assistance. In southern Ethiopia, Merlin remains one of the few organizations on the ground. It is a region mostly affected by the drought and people face death from malnutrition, diarrheal diseases, measles, respiratory infections, and a variety of skin diseases.

To prevent an epidemic, Merlin has stepped in to treat those most at risk. Working with local authorities, Merlin operates 20

mobile clinics, providing a desperately needed emergency response to affected communities

Merlin's staff works especially hard to provide children with nutritional support, vaccinations, de-worming programs, and other emergency care.



*A child is screened for malnutrition at a Merlin Food distribution in Lodwar, Kenya  
Photo © Sven Torfinn 2011*

## In Kenya

In Kenya, Merlin has responded to the famine with a series of proactive prevention initiatives. While crops have failed and food prices have moved higher and higher, Merlin's roving nurses and nutrition officers identify former health facilities to be rehabilitated into functioning clinics.

Our staff continue to provide vaccinations, institute malaria prevention programs, ensure clean water supplies, and distribute nutrition supplements.

Merlin has worked in Kenya since 1998 and supports over 150 medical centers. Nearly 850,000 people have access to our primary care and nutrition support services.

As the effects of the famine spread, Merlin plans to provide nearly half a million people in immediate crisis with medical support.

*Merlin thanks David Curtis for his work to produce the stories for this newsletter.*

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