

Meeting urgent needs in Darfur



Photo: © International Committee of the Red Cross

The British Red Cross joined forces with other leading international aid charities in the UK in May 2007 to launch an emergency appeal to save lives in Darfur, Chad and the Central African Republic. The Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) appeal reflects the level of concern at the escalating instability in Sudan and neighbouring countries, where as many as 4.5 million people are affected by conflict.

The appeal, which closed on 24 June, had raised more than £8.5 million. The British Red Cross has been working in Sudan's western Darfur region since 2004, where more than two million people have been forced to flee their homes, including around 230,000 people who have sought safety in neighbouring Chad.

Internal conflict in Chad has led to around 147,000 Chadian civilians being displaced in the east of the country. Chad is also hosting some 40,000 refugees who have fled fighting in the Central African Republic. Due to its long-standing neutrality, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is one of the few organisations

reaching and assisting people from every affected community. The ICRC, supported by the British Red Cross, is providing most basic services in Gereida, South Darfur, including food, water, healthcare and household essentials to more than 100,000 people.

In a joint project with the Australian Red Cross, the British Red Cross has provided feeding centres for severely and moderately malnourished children in a camp for displaced people in Gereida. Penny Connley, a nurse in Gereida, is one of five Red Cross personnel working in Sudan. She said simply: "My job saves children's lives. It would be disastrous if we weren't here."

Money raised by the appeal is helping provide people with shelter, clean water and sanitation, as well as emergency food and medical care.

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Alone but not isolated – thanks to the Red Cross

The Red Cross works with thousands of vulnerable people every year in the UK to help avoid hospital admission and reduce time spent in hospital by providing extra support and care at home. The friendly support offered by our volunteers in people's own homes prevents social isolation, increases independence, boosts confidence and helps them resume a normal pattern of living.

In 2006, we helped 365,900 people through a personal crisis with our independent living and community equipment services, making a difference to the quality of their daily lives. The services are growing with 60,000 more people helped last year than in 2005. Working with health and social care organisations, we provide care in the home, loan medical equipment, as well as provide transport services, skin camouflage and therapeutic massage to meet individual needs.

Our care in the home service helped one intrepid senior citizen in Omagh, Co Tyrone to cope with the difficulties posed by living alone following serious illness and a major operation. Otilie Duncan (below right), who is in her late seventies, has been living in Northern Ireland for 18 years. Originally from South Africa, she spent many years

working in Zimbabwe with her late husband, a medical doctor. It was during her time in Africa that she first encountered the Red Cross and ended up volunteering for the organisation herself, starting a number of training schools for women living in rural areas.

After her husband died, Mrs Duncan relocated to Omagh, her husband's birthplace. She made many friends but after developing bowel cancer she worried how she would cope alone after leaving hospital.

Red Cross volunteers helped towards her rehabilitation and transported her to outpatient appointments when she wasn't able to drive herself.

"The Red Cross has been really terrific," she said. "I never thought I'd need to be on the receiving end of assistance from the organisation, but they have really helped me when I've been a bit stuck – helping with shopping and getting me to the health centre."

She added: "I'm starting to feel better and am learning to cope with my new life. I hope to get involved with some voluntary work myself once I'm feeling stronger."



Prepared for the worst in Bangladesh



Photo: © International Federation

The British Red Cross not only responds to disasters but also works with communities to help them prepare for emergencies, in order to save lives and safeguard livelihoods. Our disaster preparedness work includes giving local people the skills and resources to respond to an emergency, and making sure vital relief such as food and blankets are easily accessible in disaster-prone areas.

The British Red Cross has been working for decades to lessen the impact of disaster in Bangladesh, which is prone to cyclones and flooding.

There has been a large reduction in the number of lives lost: the 1970 cyclone caused 300,000 deaths, but cyclones of a similar scale in 1977 and 1998 killed 111 and 19 respectively.

We have built ten cyclone shelters in Bangladesh and are working with the Bangladesh Red Crescent to provide funding and technical support to its community-based disaster preparedness programme.

Mother-of-five Halima Khatoon, from Char Chandia village, vividly remembers a major cyclone in April 1991. The villagers did not receive any warning and, when it hit during the night, Halima was trapped with her children under the collapsed roof of her house. Fortunately, her husband and brother managed to rescue them from the rubble and, although injured, they survived. Halima later joined the Bangladesh Red Crescent as a first aid and awareness volunteer in its cyclone preparedness programme.

The programme involves volunteers listening to the radio for cyclone information. They then inform the community, such as advising people not to go to sea. If the warning is more severe, they advise people to pack dry food and essentials and go to the cyclone shelters.

News in brief

Reaching for the sky

Fifty-two of the UK's most skilled skydivers formed the largest ever cross formation skydive to mark Red Cross Appeal Week. The all-female skydiving team the Brit Chicks performed the stunt 18,000 feet above Nottinghamshire to raise the profile of the Red Cross during its annual fundraising week in May.

Around the UK, volunteers and staff put together events ranging from the extravagant to the extraordinary to raise vital funds. There were Dress in Red events across the country, hula-hooping competitions and pub quizzes, to name but a few. Mark Astarita, director of fundraising, said: "I'd like to thank everyone who took part and made Red Cross Appeal Week so much fun, whether they signed up to shake a bucket, dressed in red or staged their own fundraising challenge."



Photo: © Andy Ford

Communities recover after Indonesia earthquake

Communities devastated by the earthquake that struck near Yogyakarta, Indonesia last year are taking the lead in their own recovery, thanks to the support of the British Red Cross. The magnitude 6.3 earthquake that struck near the Javanese city on 27 May 2006 claimed more than 5,000 lives and left 1.1 million people homeless.

Following the quake, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies launched an early recovery programme, where communities work together to manage the construction of their own low cost and quake-resilient shelters. More than 12,500 shelters have been completed with the help of the Red Cross and more than 14,000 families assisted with tools for reconstruction.

Celebrating Refugee Week

The British Red Cross took part in the annual Refugee Week, a special event celebrating the contribution of refugees to the UK.

Refugee Week, which ran from 18 to 24 June, is a UK-wide programme of arts, cultural and educational events that helps to promote understanding about the reasons why people seek sanctuary.

As a humanitarian organisation, the Red Cross works to dispel myths about asylum seekers and refugees, and the week provides an opportunity to promote its valuable work with vulnerable people from overseas.

The week began with ‘Celebrating Sanctuary’, a refugee arts festival in London featuring musicians, artists and storytellers. A number of events were arranged during the week by Red Cross branches across the UK. For example, in Bedfordshire there were two discussion evenings, one about Muslim culture and the other led by an asylum seeker describing why she fled Zimbabwe.

In Glasgow, the Red Cross hosted a packed four-day programme of events at the city’s prestigious Tron

Theatre. Highlights included a comedy night featuring Frankie Boyle (from TV’s *Mock the Week* show) and award-winning film director Lindsay Hill, who discussed her acclaimed documentary work about the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Scotland.

Our youth and schools team, supported by Confab Theatre Company, also hosted a range of workshops with primary schools in Glasgow to discuss issues around refugees.

The British Red Cross has a long tradition of responding to people in need and offers a number of services to those who have had to leave their homes behind.

These include:

- > Orientation services to help people access support and assistance and adapt to life in the UK
- > Specialist advice, practical support and comfort for those in crisis or transition
- > Tracing services to restore contact with family members separated by conflict or disaster
- > Emergency support for large-scale refugee evacuations.

Together again – after 63 years

After decades of searching, the Red Cross’ international tracing and message service has succeeded in reuniting a mother and son 63 years after they were forcibly separated in Poland during the Second World War. When Anna Rogers’ baby boy, Andrzej, was taken from her by the Nazis, she despaired of ever seeing him again. She was sent to a labour camp in Austria, while the infant was taken in by two women eager to claim his inheritance. After the war, Anna made her way to London and sent for Andrzej, but the women refused to give up her son. And so began a long odyssey.

Anna moved to Canada in 1954, but never gave up sending letters to her son. Back in Poland, baby Andrzej grew up and spent years trying to find his mother. Then, on her deathbed, one of his guardians finally spoke of his mother’s undying love. His initial enquiries led to the British Red Cross, where the search for Anna began in earnest in 1963. The mother and son were finally reunited this year, amid many hugs and happy tears, at Toronto



Photo: © Canadian Red Cross

International airport. “She looks wonderful,” Andrzej said. “It’s a dream come true. I never thought I would be able to find her. “I’m so happy,” Anna smiled. “That’s my baby.”

In 2006, the British Red Cross traced 321 families separated by natural disasters and conflict and delivered 852 Red Cross messages between loved ones.