

The AOG Saves Lives

By Raj Raja Rayan

On the 14th of August 2006, the Sri Lankan Air Force, 'inadvertently' bombed the square mile of the acknowledged 'Peace Village' in the North East part of Sri Lanka where there were seven officially registered orphanages. These included orphanages for little girls as well as for deaf and blind children and several for victims of the December 2004 Tsunami.

The North and East of Sri Lanka is, historically, Tamil territory. There has been a civil war for control by the Sinhalese majority Government since not long after independence in 1948. A tenuous peace agreement between Tamils and Sinhalese had been in place for over 5 years. It recently evaporated following the promise of billions of dollars of tsunami funding.

An orphanage was hit by Air Force bombs and 61 young girls were killed. The AOG was in turmoil as it had recently helped finance a brand new orphanage for children in the North East of Sri Lanka. Several emails were sent to the NGO which constructed the orphanage, the UN and WHO – to which there were no replies. It was a desperate time.

Two days later, confirmation arrived that the site that was bombed was the very site from which children had been taken for the orphanage supported by the AOG. Some 241 children who lived there had already been re-housed in modern new facilities on a completely different site close to Western NGO offices. The AOG kids were safe. The AOG buildings were safe. Members of the AOG inadvertently saved the lives of at least 241 young girls, most of who were under the age of 12 years.

The AOG had supported the orphanage because of the tsunami of 2004. On Boxing Day 2004, a freak tsunami devastated South

Asia killing well over 200,000 people. On the North East coast of Sri Lanka, some 278 people out of every thousand who lived by the shore died. There was plenty to do. By the 14th of January 2005, Manny Vasant and Raj Majithia, with the help of Dental Directory, held a charity dinner. President Rishi Mehrotra made a moving appeal. Dental Directory, Henry Schein, Kavo, Dentsply and many other organisations donated free goods for auction. Over £100,000 was collected on the night with numerous other pledges. As usual, the AOG decided to support a health care project and funded several building to house lecture theatres and hostel accommodation for paramedics and other health care workers. This project was completed and the first batch of students as health care support workers are currently having their courses.

Several individual members of the AOG wanted to help further – especially since international aid had been blocked by the international community till the politically bickering parties in Sri Lanka came to an equitable arrangement of how to share the spoils. Widespread corruption in relation to aid was also alleged. Hence the unfortunate victims of the tsunami, especially in the disempowered and impoverished North East of the island, were left without much support. Members of the AOG, including Manny and Meena Vasant, Raj & Tarun Majithia, Rashmi & Mahesh Patel, Amarjit & Dipi Khambay, Tej Vasir, Rash & Norah Patel amongst others, contributed five figure sums each to construct at least one of the buildings within the orphanage. Together, they saved over 240 lives.

There are still some 500 children living in temporary accommodation. £11,500 will allow an entire hostel building to be named after the donor. Smaller sums are used to construct common buildings or improve facilities. For



Orphans in 'Peace Village'.



Leaky mudhuts riddled with termites.



New homes being constructed.



Children in new premises.

photographs, plans of buildings and costs, please visit the AOG website.

If you want to make a contribution, please contact Manny Vasant on mvasant@btinternet.com or Raj Majithia on rajmajithia@dsl.pipex.com

Thanks to all who have contributed to the AOG's tsunami effort. AOG activity not merely enhances life – but saves lives.

Editors Note:

The AOG has supported numerous projects with substantial cash donations including over £80,000, for the Gujarat Earthquake to Lord Dholakia's charity, other sums to the Deendayal Project in Chitrakoot, the Tanzanian Musoma project this year).

