MADAGASCAR
Nirina, a long fight against noma

BURKINA FASO
A surgical mission brings together

SWITZERLAND
New prosthesis for Possibo, thanks to your support
Editorial

To all of you who, rather than considering that the advocacy of a cause and participation is meaningless idealism and an empty act, supported our actions throughout the year, we express our most heartfelt gratitude. Through your donations, your time, your interest, you have sown the seeds of hope for a better future and contributed in a tangible and sustainable way to the life of those who are at the basis of our commitment. We are deeply touched and even shaken.

Thanks to your contribution, young Burkinabe and Nigers afflicated with noma have discovered, surprised and relieved, their new faces; Madagascan teenagers deprived of their freedom for nothing or so little were reunited with their families and were able to go back to school; young mothers and children in the Eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo have seen a considerable improvement of their life conditions whilst before they were only surviving in deep poverty and indifference.

Thanks to their courage, enthusiasm and fortitude, they overcame trauma or were able to develop an income-generating activity; completed vocation training; made their way to health recovery; rebuilt their houses with you and Sentinelles on their side.

In 2019, crucial challenges are ahead of us and we harbour the dream that every one of us will not only continue their commitment but also encourage their family and friends to contribute to Sentinelles as a wide solidarity movement. From the depths of our heart, we thank you for your support.

Marlyse Morard
Managing Director

In Brief

Yeraldin and Felipe top of the class

When the Home took charge of Felipe, 10 years old, and his sister Yeraldin, 6 years old, they had neither home nor close family to take them in. Their mother, grandmother and one of their aunts were all three in prison from the beginning of 2016. The children had been living with different neighbouring families for five months, moving from house to house. The last family with which they lived could no longer keep them and found it difficult to protect them from the street and from bad company.

Since their arrival in the Home, where they found protection, we accompany them to the prison once a month to visit their mother. We also got in contact with another aunt, Vanessa, 15 years old, who also lived on the street before a neighbour close to her mother took her in. Vanessa goes to school and seems to have found a “normal life” for a girl of her age. She sometimes comes to the Home on Saturday afternoon to spend time with her nephew and niece. We are also looking for a foster family who could take in Felipe and Yeraldin at least during the weekends.

In August, I attended the presentation of school reports and felt great pride in learning that Yeraldin and Felipe are top of their respective classes. In the Home since January 2017, Felipe had never been to school and today he greatly appreciates school. Aware of the challenge that awaits us, we will not give up and will continue to accompany them with tenderness and look for a foster family for them.
An account by Adam Gmürr, a young high school student from Lausanne, who has organised a fundraising gala for Sentinelles on Saturday 13th October in Lausanne.

“In the framework of my high school diploma studies at the Gymnase Provence (Lausanne), I decided to organise a fundraising gala in support of the Sentinelles Foundation. Their commitment to help children in distress touches me deeply and especially the treatment of children suffering from Noma, this deadly disease that attacks their faces.

Selecting Sentinelles as beneficiary of my project was not a random choice. In fact, each Christmas from my earliest childhood, my grandfather used to make a donation to this Foundation in the name of each of his grandchildren. He also bequeathed a large share of his inheritance to Sentinelles. My father also committed to this initiative by making regular donations.

Now it’s my turn to make my contribution and to help, as best I can, those who need it most. For me, it is very important to help each other and to provide the means, together, to change things. Indeed, I find that too many people remain passive in the face of all the inequalities present in the world. It is high time to change this in view of the urgency of the situation.

Having participated in this project in one way or another, you have not only contributed to the dream of a high school student, but well and truly made a better and happier life for so many people in distress. The slightest gesture counts, however small it is. It joins the others to forge, together, a solid link with the most deprived.

And, all together, we will forge a link to lift out of misfortune and oblivion those on whom life has not yet smiled.”

**Sentinelles exhibits in Fribourg**

The Association “Sentinelles Fribourg” continues its wonderful commitment to support Sentinelles and invites you to an exhibition of photographs.

You are cordially invited to the preview, Saturday 15th December 2018 at 11h.

Espace 25, boulevard de Pérolle 25, Fribourg, from 13th to 31st December 2018.

**GIFT IDEAS**

I wish to order:
- a subscription to Sentinelles bulletin CHF 20.- 6 issues/year
- the book “La Grâce du Monde” Edmond Kaiser · CHF 25.- *
- the book “Entretiens avec Edmond Kaiser” by Christophe Gallaz · CHF 20.- *
- both books mentioned above at the special price of CHF 35.- *
- the set of ten cards 210 x 148 mm · CHF 15.- *

* Plus shipping costs

To order on our website or by telephon 021 646 19 46

**SENTINELLES**

**News of Ita**

Ita, a pygmy from the Central African Republic seriously affected by noma, is continuing his journey in Switzerland for the reconstruction of his face with courage, strength and dignity. The latest stage for him has been the reconstruction of his nose (see Sentinelles n°. 259).

The operation consisted of removing the expander (balloon placed beneath the forehead and inflated little by little to reconstruct the skin of the nose) and taking a piece of rib to create the nasal bone necessary for this intervention. The operation went well and Ita was soon able to go back to the “Maison de Terre des hommes” in Massongex. Nevertheless, the first days were rather difficult; the young man had to get used to his face with a new nose, accept his new image. Today, Ita has regained his smile and wears his new sunglasses with joy and a lot of class! He seems glad to have made the decision to face this new operation. His treatment is coming to an end, with only a few last adjustments to the reconstruction of his face.
Brought together on a surgical mission

The surgical mission at the beginning of the year brought together women, men and children from many very different backgrounds, who often don’t share the same languages or the same customs. Exchanges are rich, intense, often happy, sometimes tense or source of misunderstandings, but always in a climate of mutual respect.

Mariam travelled from Cameroon to benefit from Professor Brigitte Pittet’s trip to Western Africa. We came and fetched her at the airport with her travel mate who will also be her interpreter. The 27-year-old woman doesn’t speak a word of either French or English. Her laughing gaze and her firm grip are telling signs about her capacity to adjust. Nevertheless, it is one of the very first times she leaves her Cameroonian bush village. She is fearless. When she arrives at the camp, she very quickly finds her marks and integrates in the women’s group even though she doesn’t understand a word. Non-verbal communication, laughter and the assurance to be in a warm environment where everyone shares the same difficulties, is bringing the participants together in simplicity.

On her side, Nogaye is only 10. She travelled from Senegal escorted by Air Burkina stewardesses. Her grandmother, who takes care of her, is too old to come along. Nogaye is very mature for her age. An orphan, she started her life in harsh conditions and without much affection. She learned to fend for herself. However, Nogaye’s first days at the Centre are difficult. Afraid and unable to understand what is said and done around her, she’ll make it clear by pulling our arms towards the door that she wants to go home before even being operated on! The local team members, who are used to handling such difficulties and sorrows during the first days, place her in the good care of Ismaël’s mother, a 5-year old boy from Burkina who is also suffering from noma sequelae. The woman is caring

A two-week surgical mission is:

- 73 examined patients
- 37 patients operated on for noma sequelae and other afflictions

Beyond the borders:

- 14 patients came by bus from Mali with the organisations “Avec Mali” and “Au fil de la vie”
- 1 patient came by plane from Senegal
- 1 patient arrived by plane from Cameroon with the “Ashia” organisation supported by “Noma-Hilfe”

A mission made possible thanks to the contribution of voluntary workers and partner organisations:

- 12 members of the surgical ward of the Hôpitaux universitaires de Genève (HUG) led by Professor Brigitte Pittet. They travelled thanks to the support of the “Association Supporting People with Facial Mutilation”
- 8 nurses and workers of the association “Ensemble pour Eux”
- 3 physiotherapists and speech therapists of the association “Physionoma” for post-operative care
and patient with the little one, she takes her under her wing. After a few days, thanks to her affection and to the affection of the “Ensemble pour Eux” workers who are really dedicated, Nogaye is unrecognizable. She laughs and plays along as if she has always been living here!

The days pass. Mariam, Nogaye and Ismael have been operated on by the Hôpitaux universitaires de Genève (HUG) team. The periods of often painful treatments alternate with playtime and the preparation of the end-of-mission party. After two weeks, the HUG and “Ensemble pour Eux” teams go back to Europe. Most of the patients will still stay several additional weeks at the Centre to enable good cicatrisation. One day it is also time to go back for Mariam who still has an energetic handshake and a large smile, then for Nogaye. Ismael’s mother kindly requests if she can get a print photo where the three of them are together so she can take with her a souvenir of “her” young Senegalese girl.

FACE RE-EDUCATION
After the departure of the surgical teams, three young women of the physiotherapy and speech therapy association Physionoma are tending to the post-op care, to facilitate the draining of the operated face tissue and start re-education. They are an essential link in the solidarity chain making it possible to give functional and esthetical facial capabilities back to those who are mutilated by noma.

They relentlessly take care of the patients who queue to be able to lay down on the mattress and benefit from very pleasant massages. Most of them go to sleep a few minutes into the session, eventually relaxed.

Re-education will continue during the following weeks with more active exercises on tissue and joint mobilisation. We were also able this year to benefit from a second Physionoma mission, this time in August during the children’s school holiday season. It was the occasion to do functional check-ups and meet with the children one by one, along with the training of new staff or providing continuous training to the Centre’s staff. Our workers are always very keen on such moments of exchange and continuous education.

INSECURITY AND FUTURE MISSIONS
All of this good will is jeopardized by the current insecurity prevailing in Burkina Faso. Attacks in the centre of Ouagadougou and armed raids have converted a large part of the country into an unstable zone, making the missions difficult or even impossible to be organised for teams who come from partner hospitals in Europe.

To continue operating on each Burkinabe patient who would need it, all options are being considered on a case by case basis. Those who are most affected will be transferred to the HUG in Switzerland.

Some patients are operated in Niger at the Children Hospital in Niamey. These missions, organised by Sentinelles Zinder in collaboration with “CURE” and Nigerien and European surgical teams, welcome each time about twenty children, teenagers and adults. Niger is an opportunity for the Burkinabe patients even if it also faces difficult safety conditions.

The HUG team isn’t authorised to go to Ouagadougou any longer and their next mission will likely take place in 2019 at the Tanguïêta hospital in the North of Benin. We wish to continue this excellent collaboration. It isn’t impossible to take to Tanguïêta some Burkinabe or Malian patients who also suffer from the consequences of terrorism. However, it requires a change in our logistics and we need additional means to move both the patients and a part of our small care team whilst keeping our Ouagadougou Care Centre functional for our beneficiaries. This is a challenge. Your support is needed more than ever to continue our operations and keep fighting noma in Burkina Faso and in the region.
Nirina, a dignified life found again

Noma also claims victims in Madagascar. Nirina, suffering from noma from the age of three, had part of her face restored thanks to Sentinelles. Our follow up has allowed her son to go back to school and Nirina has been able to start a small business and repair the roof of her house.

Nirina is a young woman originally from Analavory, a village to the east of Antananarivo, the capital. Today aged thirty three, she has lived since her very early childhood with part of her face eaten away by noma. When she was three years old, a swelling appeared on the left side of her jaw. Very quickly, this part of her face became necrotic and detached itself. Her mother took her to the village’s doctor, who managed to stop the evolution of the gangrene with antibiotic treatment. One month later, her wound had healed, but her face retained the scars of the disease. From then on she couldn’t open her mouth properly. As a child, she also always felt pain which extended to her ears and which continued to adulthood, especially when she had to make an effort or was tired.

The Sentinelles team in Madagascar had known Nirina’s mother and her brothers and sisters for several years. This large family, who had been discovered in great difficulty after the death of the father, was followed in the framework of our programme “The right to be”. However, we did not know Nirina, the eld-
est, who lived far away from her family. Having learnt to live with her handicap, she had made her own way in life, had married and had two children now aged nine and four. Her husband had unfortunately succumbed to illness in 2016 and her life as a widow with her parents-in-law had proved complicated. Nirina therefore returned to her mother in Analavory, accompanied by her two boys. She was lodged in a house belonging to the extended family and the young woman had begun to do daily agricultural work to survive.

SEVERAL OPERATIONS
When she returned, the aesthetic consequences of the aftereffects left by noma finished by making her suffer more than she could bear. After a relatively long absence from her home village, she felt strongly the negative comments and stares of a community that didn’t know her well. It was therefore at the beginning of 2017 that Nirina’s mother came to our offices in Antananarivo with her daughter, thinking that Sentinelles might be able to help her.

The care was, as a priority, medical. Not having found a solution in the framework of a surgical mission, Sentinelles introduced Nirina to specialists from the stomatology and maxillofacial centre of the Befelatanana Hospital in Antananarivo. After many examinations and analyses, the head doctor of the service recommended several surgical interventions. The young woman therefore knew that she would have to arm herself with courage and patience.

Until now, three major surgical operations have been carried out between May 2017 and May 2018 to improve the aesthetics of her face. During this period, several minor operations were also performed to allow a better opening of her mouth. During these operations, check-ups and convalescence in the capital, Nirina, accompanied by her mother, stayed in Sentinelles’ Reception Centre. At the same time, the young mother had to carry out daily mechanotherapy exercises at home, essential re-education to rediscover the highest possible degree of use of her mouth. Very aware of their importance, Nirina has always carried them out with diligence.

A lot of ground has been covered from a medical point of view. Although the doctors plan a few more minor operations, the results are already satisfactory.

TOWARDS INDEPENDENCE
As mentioned above, her status as a young widow alone with children required accompaniment to improve the socio-economic situation of her family. After the death of her husband, Nirina, having returned to her native village, was working as an agricultural labourer, a very difficult, very badly paid and irregular job. Despite the solidarity of her mother and her sisters, her situation allowed her just to feed her children. During the periods of medical treatment and convalescence, Sentinelles provided the family with food rations. At the same time, during this period, a plan for the improvement of her socio-economic situation had been prepared with Nirina, the aim being for her to be able to meet the basic needs of her family.

Her eldest son, who she had been forced to take out of school because of a lack of funds following the death of her husband, was able to enrol in school again thanks to our support. The youngest child is not yet old enough to go to school. Little by little, as soon as her state of health allowed, Nirina launched her vegetable business, which she chose to supplement with the fabrication and sale of pasta thanks to a microcredit which we granted her.

Whilst ensuring the repayment, Nirina managed to save money to build walls allowing her to install a small independent kitchen in the living room.

She lacked funds to add a roof and to repair the one, made from very worn out thatch, covering the part of the house where they lodged. Thanks to her efforts and a helping hand from her family, she was able to provide some of the materials and cover the transport. Sentinelles completed what was missing. Nirina is now managing well, but our local team is continuing to ensure a follow up, particularly on a medical level and for her son’s schooling. When medical accompaniment will no longer be necessary, thanks to Nirina’s efforts, we are sure that she will quickly be able to manage and continue her life much more easily than before.

With CHF 30.–
you can offer the beginning of an income-generating activity through a microcredit

With CHF 200.–
the entire roof of a family home can be replaced in the framework of a housing aid
Upon arriving in Switzerland, Possibo is welcomed for a month by Michèle, a former Sentinelles worker. Appointments at OrthoKern Orthopedists in Lausanne are held one after another, to do measurements and casting. The young woman is then invited to test her new prosthesis for the first time. Already! Possibo is riddled with apprehension after all the setbacks she encountered in Burkina Faso where she switched prosthesis four times in four years. The first fitting is promising. It requires some technique and the use of socks and nylons around her tibia stump so it isn't hurt and the prosthesis holds. Difficult to imagine what people with a limb amputation endure in some countries.

The delicate art of the prosthetist consists of distributing the bodyweight in a balanced way on the whole stump surface, so it is not applying pressure or hurting the skin. After the first week of testing, the orthopaedist recommends the prosthesis be tightened because it is shaky. After a few steps on the streets of Lausanne, Possibo feels a sharp pain. She goes back to the orthopaedist in a rush to release the prosthesis that has already acted like a tourniquet and interrupted the blood flow in her leg. We have to wait for a week before the pain gradually fades and fine-tuning can be made. The Sentinelles team is also riddled with apprehension. What if, after all these efforts, she goes back to Burkina Faso with a useless prosthesis? It would be a devastating failure. Fortunately, after a final adjustment, Possibo smiles again and so do we. After a month in Switzerland during which we shared hope, doubts and trust, and also laughed around fondues and raclettes, it is time to go back home. In the beginning of May, we take her to Geneva airport. How will her leg and prosthesis react to the extreme heat conditions at that time of the year, this remains an open question. We are relieved after a few days. Here is the message Possibo sent us:

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to all of you who supported me financially or in any other way, so my prosthesis could be made in Switzerland.

My new prosthesis fits really well and it has radically changed my life, nightmares are over now. I am a happy woman now and my family and friends are glad too. Together we say THANK YOU and may the Lord bless you abundantly.

Possibo

It is an opportunity to thank again each of you for your precious help, Michèle for her warm welcome, Mr. Gabriel, the orthopaedist, for the love of his work and his patience when he was doing the adjustments. ■