
SENTINELLES

TO THE RESCUE OF WOUNDED INNOCENCE

N° 282 / June 2022



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MADAGASCAR

Placement of children
in “moral danger”

SENEGAL

Raising awareness
about abuse

SWITZERLAND

Discussion with
Edmond Kaiser

Edito

The condition of children and young people, at the heart of our commitment

The stakes in raising awareness about child abuse are immense. Many children are subjected to it without recognising its abnormal nature. This makes them even more vulnerable. Preventing the many forms of child abuse and promoting a positive approach to education are therefore essential. Sentinelles is constantly developing its prevention activities with families, schools, communities and religious authorities, thus reinforcing protection factors and encouraging the freeing of speech. It also offers a differentiated response to each victim, in accordance with its relief mission.

On the other hand, it is not easy to build oneself up and assert oneself when one knows nothing about one's family. The desperate search of T., a young Madagascan, has been going on for almost 15 years. He is always on the lookout for a sign, waiting for the improbable, for someone who would recognise in him the child who was lost or entrusted to a third party a long time ago. T. will grow up far from his family, shuffled from institution to institution. Unfortunately, his case is not isolated. Other lost, abandoned or disabled children are placed in re-education institutions for many months without having committed the slightest crime. Moving heaven and earth to find their family, offering an environment more conducive to their development and blossoming become our absolute priority.

Maltreatment, abandonment, placement in unsuitable structures for lack of alternatives, this is the fate of many children in Senegal, Madagascar and elsewhere. It is possible to prevent and reduce these evils through support for families and a multisectoral approach in terms of awareness-raising. In the face of the scale of violence against children, in the face of suffering, Edmond Kaiser used to say: "Right to discouragement, no, right to despair, always".

So let us act!



Marlyse Morard
Director

IN BRIEF



I NIGER

Radio to combat noma

Last year, Sentinelles set up a project to broadcast radio messages aimed at raising awareness among the population of the Zinder region of the first signs of noma and methods of preventing this disease. For 6 months, more than 500 awareness-raising spots were broadcast on 5 radio stations, covering a population of 2.3 million people.

Thanks to this project, we have seen a clear increase in consultations at the Sentinelles Centre in Zinder. The figures show that three times as many children came for consultation in 2021 than in the previous year; the vast majority of them only had gingivitis, but as noma is always triggered by necrotising gingivitis, cases of noma could certainly be avoided. In view of the positive impact of this project, a second phase of messages, supported by BCV Solidarités, started in March 2022.

I NURSING CARE

Successful first operation for Latif

Latif, 15, who suffers from the after-effects of noma, arrived from Burkina Faso to have an operation. His nose was destroyed by the disease and the operation, which is particularly complex, is not possible in his country.

He landed in Geneva escorted by Aude, a volunteer courier from Aviation Sans Frontières, who was delighted to meet him. Latif is a smiling and very communicative young man who adapts quickly to situations. We took him to the Rennaz hospital for his initial check-up. After a good meal and a few frenzied games of table football, Latif returned to his room for the medical examinations during which he was accompanied by volunteers whom we thank warmly. The next day, he went to La maison de Terre des hommes in Massongex (Valais), where he quickly got used to his new environment and was happy to meet new friends. The first intervention took place and went very well. We are at his side throughout his medical journey, for which we wish him courage and the best.

I CONGO

Skills development in rural areas

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, Didier, our intern who recently graduated from the Institut Supérieur de Développement Rural in Bukavu, is implementing several small projects throughout the year to support our local team. He focuses his activities on the women and children that Sentinelles follows in rural areas.

With his knowledge, he works to improve the families' ability to raise rabbits, guinea pigs or pigs, teaches good farming practices, the use of compost, the multiplication of healthy cassava cuttings or the planting of fruit trees.

The acquisition or improvement of these skills is essential to enable families to become self-sufficient in the long term.



I BURKINA FASO

Continuation of maxillofacial surgery

Despite a very difficult security context and a politically unstable start to the year in Burkina Faso leading to the establishment of a transitional government, surgical interventions continue. A maxillofacial surgery mission was organised by our partner La Chaîne de l'Espoir in January, during which 14 patients referred by Sentinelles were treated by the team of Prof. Narcisse Zwetyenga. Then, during another surgical

mission organised in February, some fifteen children had their cleft lip and palate closed by the team of Dr Aissata Baillet and her association "Pour la Promotion de la Chirurgie Réparatrice" (NGO PPCR). The next Chain of Hope mission is planned for June in Ouagadougou. A big thank you to the surgical teams and our partners who continue their commitment in Burkina Faso.

Fighting child abuse

The importance of Sentinelles' awareness-raising activities among the Senegalese population, as seen through the eyes of Pauline, a Belgian social worker on an immersion trip.

"I have now been working for four weeks at Sentinelles in Senegal. It took me some time to observe and adapt to each of the carefully thought-out programmes that Sentinelles offers: assistance with care, talibé children and the reintegration of children into the family environment.

Working on such important issues requires the implementation of awareness-raising activities. These are formidable weapons that make it possible to deconstruct preconceived ideas, to exchange ideas, to listen, to put an end to the trivialisation of certain behaviours, but above all to intervene concretely with children living in abusive situations. Social workers can raise awareness among the families with whom they work, but real societal change can only be achieved by reaching a wider public, through the cooperation of community actors.

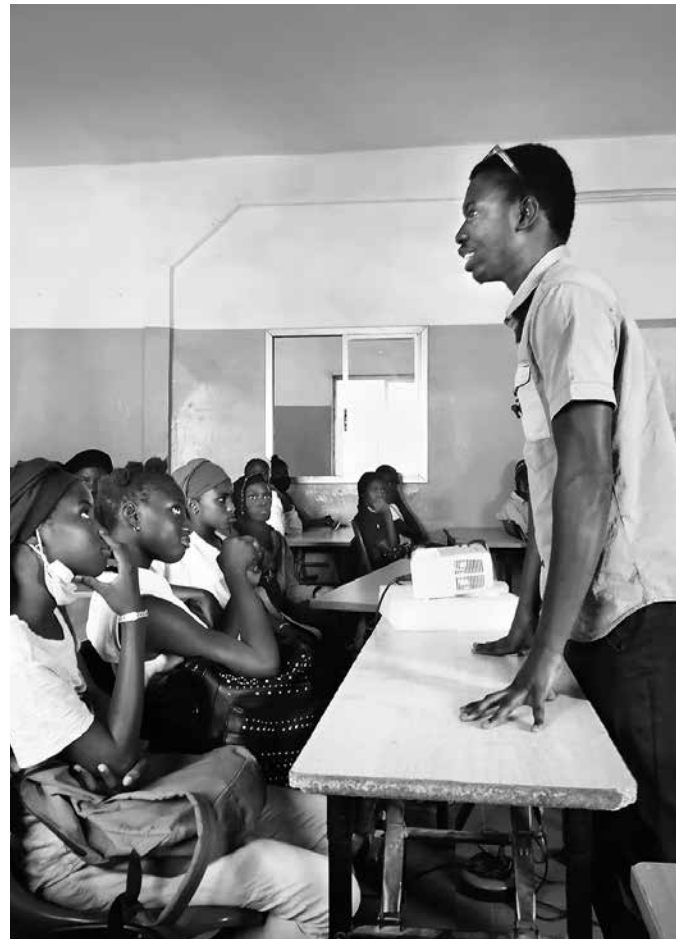
With the help of the social worker, the Bajenu Gokh (neighbourhood godmother) and a Senegalese theatre director specialising in community awareness-raising, we set up these activities with youth and women's associations.

A group of about 20 people—children, women and men—watch the film shown by Sentinelles. It denounces certain forms of abuse, including the deprivation of children's right to education, corporal punishment, rape and excision. Each time, we see the indignation on the faces of some. The film has an effect.

Mame, a 19-year-old girl participating in the animation, aptly develops the notion of 'trauma', a concept she seems to master quite well. Later, she will share her experiences with the Sentinelles' social worker.

From a very young age, Mame was entrusted to her maternal aunt. The practice of entrustment is generally well established in West Africa and is motivated by the idea that a child placed with a third party will benefit from a better education. However, treated like a housewife since she was a child, kicked out of her home, denigrated and abandoned by her family, her situation is unbearable. Thus, while still a minor, she is advised to marry early to cover her needs. Although she is a brilliant student, Mame reluctantly stops her schooling to dedicate herself to her marriage.

However, hopes for a better life soon give way to disillusionment. Mame soon becomes the mother of two children. Abandoned by her husband, with no financial support, she had to provide for her two daughters, who were barely one and three years old.



'I had no choice but to wean my baby, I only eat once a day, I was too exhausted to continue breastfeeding.'

This situation of great vulnerability that many young girls face in Senegal exposes them, like Mame, to sexual exploitation for economic survival. While Mame has managed not to lose herself in this activity, this is unfortunately not the case for many others.

While the latter exists in several forms, such as child trafficking, pornography, prostitution or child sex tourism, there is also what is known as *mbaraan*.

This is a familiar and commonplace practice in Senegal, consisting of having several partners in order to benefit from their money. Culturally, the woman expects the man to support her, notably through a gift of his time, his attention or his money. And if this function is rather attributed to men, the latter do not expect any less from their 'girlfriends', since the gesture of 'giving' puts the woman in a position of accountability involving, among other things, a sexual counterpart or a marriage at the end. It is because of their situation of great vulnerability that these young Senegalese girls come to engage in *mbaraan*, forced to make this choice simply to survive.

With the help of Sentinelles, Mame will be able to develop an income-generating activity that will allow her to become independent and to take care of all her needs. The girl will not have to find an immediate solution in sexual exploitation to support her family. In addition to helping Mame get off the ground, Sentinelles also provided medical support. A heart defect that causes her to have difficulty breathing at times of stress was identified. Although this health problem does not require treatment, she will now be able to adopt better behaviours to protect herself.

Unfortunately, Mame's situation is not an isolated one. Many similar stories have been told during preventive actions of this kind. In my opinion, these animations are a valuable part of Sentinelles' mission. The public is still not aware of the existence of



institutions that help abused children or children in serious distress. The social workers offer a space of trust in which to speak out, and it is not unreasonable to hope that the message conveyed will have raised the awareness of a large part of the group.

This immersion allowed me to feel useful in the face of this phenomenon of child abuse, which is still very present in Senegal. In this way, my role as a social worker at Sentinelles makes sense.” ■





I MADAGASCAR

Children “in moral danger” placed at Anjanamasina

The majority of minors placed at the Mandrosoa Re-education Centre of Anjanamasina (hereafter MRC), in the suburbs of Tananarive, are suspected or convicted of offences or, to a lesser extent, crimes. However, there is another minority category of boys placed as children “in moral danger”, also called “social cases”.

This reason for placement may be given by a juvenile judge in the case of minors whose family or social environment, or even their behaviour, is likely to put their physical or moral integrity at risk. This may be the case, for example, of children living in families marked by violence or of young people spending their time wandering on the streets. This type of placement can be requested either by the family or by the competent authorities. Those who end up in the MRC for this reason are subject to the same conditions and environment as those who are detained there for being in conflict with the law.

In order to obtain the release of a child who has been placed because he is deemed to be “in moral danger”, the

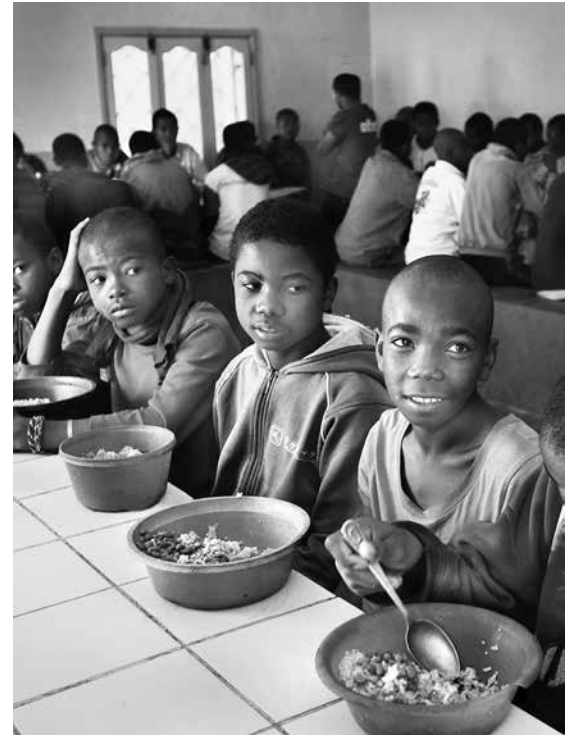
person or institution that requested the placement must apply to the judge by means of a release procedure (a judicial act by which the effects of measures taken against the child are suspended). As it is not a sentence, this type of placement is rarely of a fixed duration. In some situations, when we cannot find the person civilly responsible, getting one of these young people out can be very complicated for our social workers and our legal follow-up officer.

Hery was placed in the MRC when he was only 9 years old. According to his testimony, he comes from a large family. His parents are separated, and he used to live with his mother in Moramanga, a town located more than 130 km from Tanana-

rive. During his stay, he did not receive any visitors.

The gendarmes caught him and a friend of the same age collecting metal objects for resale, which could be considered theft. Given their young age, the children’s judge then ordered their placement at the MRC as children “in moral danger”. While, thanks to the research, visits and support of our team, the family of his “accomplice” friend was able to visit him and obtain his release, the same was not true for Hery.

According to the testimonies collected by our social workers during the search for his family, Hery is a neglected child and his mother recently left for another



town to find work, leaving her son abandoned. The judge with whom Sentinelles' lawyer in charge of legal follow-up is in contact is waiting for his mother or a civilly responsible person to come so he can order his release. The situation is blocked because all the efforts of our social workers and contacts in Moramanga to find his mother or other family members are in vain.

Faced with this situation, it was necessary to look for a more suitable home than the MRC and to make further representations to the court to finally allow a transfer. Hery stayed at the Rehabilitation Centre for two years before this was finally possible.

Fano, another of our beneficiaries who is now 14 years old, was only 11 when he was placed in the MRC as a "social case". He says that his mother died when he was still young, and his father remarried to a trader. One day he accompanied his stepmother to the big market in the capital and got lost. It is not

known whether this was intentional or not on the part of the woman. Lost, he approached police officers who were patrolling, which eventually led to his placement at the MRC.

His situation is complicated because he cannot give clear enough information to locate family members, he does not remember them. Several times, our social workers visited different places, questioned the neighbourhoods and reception centres on the basis of Fano's testimony. An outing was also organised between the social worker, the boy and a MRC agent in the area he recalls. All these efforts were unsuccessful.

At the same time, our team is looking for solutions for a placement in a more suitable reception centre, as for Hery, but it is a difficult task because places are scarce. In addition, Fano has become accustomed to his life at the MRC and is afraid of the change that another place in a home represents. The listening, awareness-raising and reassurance work that needs to be done continues at the MRC where he attends school. Fano already had some schooling when he

arrived. He is currently in CM2 (equivalent to 7th HarmoS) and should normally pass his primary school certificate this year.

Rado, 16, is another boy placed as a "social case". Physically disabled and abandoned, he lived on the streets and then went through various homes before arriving at the MRC. The efforts of his social worker are focused on finding and admitting him into a specialised reception centre for young people with disabilities, where he will receive appropriate support.

Without the work of our teams, young people in similar situations would remain stuck for many years, potentially until they reach the age of majority, at the Anjanamasina Re-education Centre, which is initially intended to receive delinquents. ■

Edmond Kaiser's battles

Excerpts from Jean Mouttapa's interview with Edmond Kaiser, 2 May 1989, published in the book *Les combats d'Edmond Kaiser* (ed. Favre, 2021).

What is the first reaction you remember that was a kind of visceral revolt?

There was no particular incident, but it was a fusion with life. When I was a child, I lived in Batignolles Street (in Paris). In the house, there was "the little blind man". It was already an entry into the interior of the being, which will remain unforgettable. Likewise, the police officers pulling a guy at the end of a chain with handcuffs is unforgettable. A drunk woman with her stockings falling down in the Batignolles Street. A horse in the snow being beaten, still in Batignolles Street. All this kneads you with the life and suffering of others. All this has entered you, and forever you have signed, without wanting to, a truly perpetual pact with those who suffer.

Words, in fact, their music and rhythm, were the object of your first vocation. At what point did you switch from poetry to direct, concrete action?

There is no turning point because we started this very early with Elisabeth. Elisabeth was my first companion, I don't like to say "my wife", I hate ownership. We looked after unfortunate people who were hanging around the Salvation Army on the Seine. Long before that, at the age of 18, I had started a first movement, in Switzerland, against crime and suicide. Before that, in Paris, I had been in charge of the 17th arrondissement section of the

League of Peace Fighters. After that, in Lausanne, a few of us founded "Les Cravates blanches" (which we wore in lavallieres), an association whose aim was to entertain the insane in their asylum. At that time there were no mental patients or psychiatric hospitals, just asylums and madmen. It was a matter of course, so there's no particular moment. Poetry was with me all the way, so it didn't die when it was time to act, it was the same thing.

What do you say when people tell you: "What you are doing is good, but it's a drop in the ocean. . . ."?

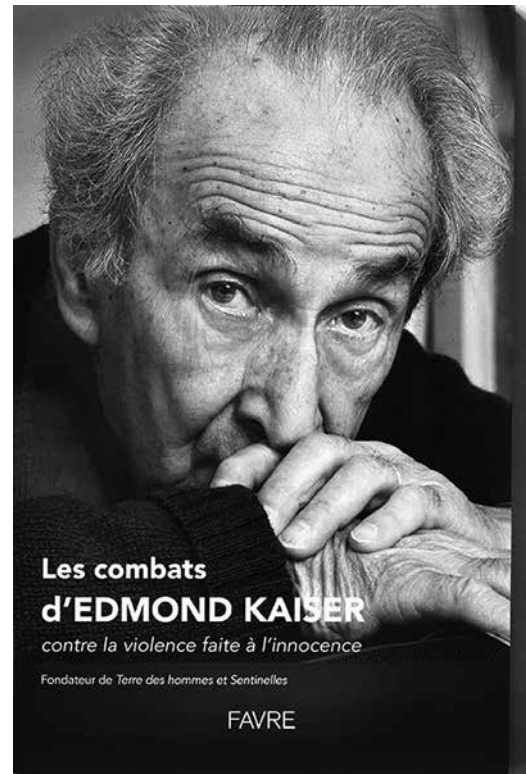
I answer that it's true, absolutely. It didn't affect the generation before or after, but I can't see you crying, or being on the floor, bleeding or starving, and then looking at it and saying: "Anyway, it's a drop in the ocean".

For the future, don't you sometimes despair of humans?

It's very difficult not to despair, but that doesn't mean discouraged. Despair because it's infinitely hopeless, because it's always worse, and it's getting worse, and it's abominable. Desperate in the face of so much suffering, yes. Right to discouragement no, to despair always.

You're going to go on and on?

There is no choice. As long as you can and we cry so much, it's worth doing something. There's no escaping it. I had



planned for 70 years, I have five more. That's no reason to do nothing. As long as you feel you are you, you don't feel your age. You carry it, without weight, from one end of your life to the other'. ■

1. Edmond Kaiser died in South India, aged 86, on 4 March 2000, on his last mission against infanticide.

You can order this book (only in French) by email at info@sentinelles.org, or by phone at 021 646 19 46. Price: CHF 18.- The profit from the sale will be donated to Sentinelles' actions.

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