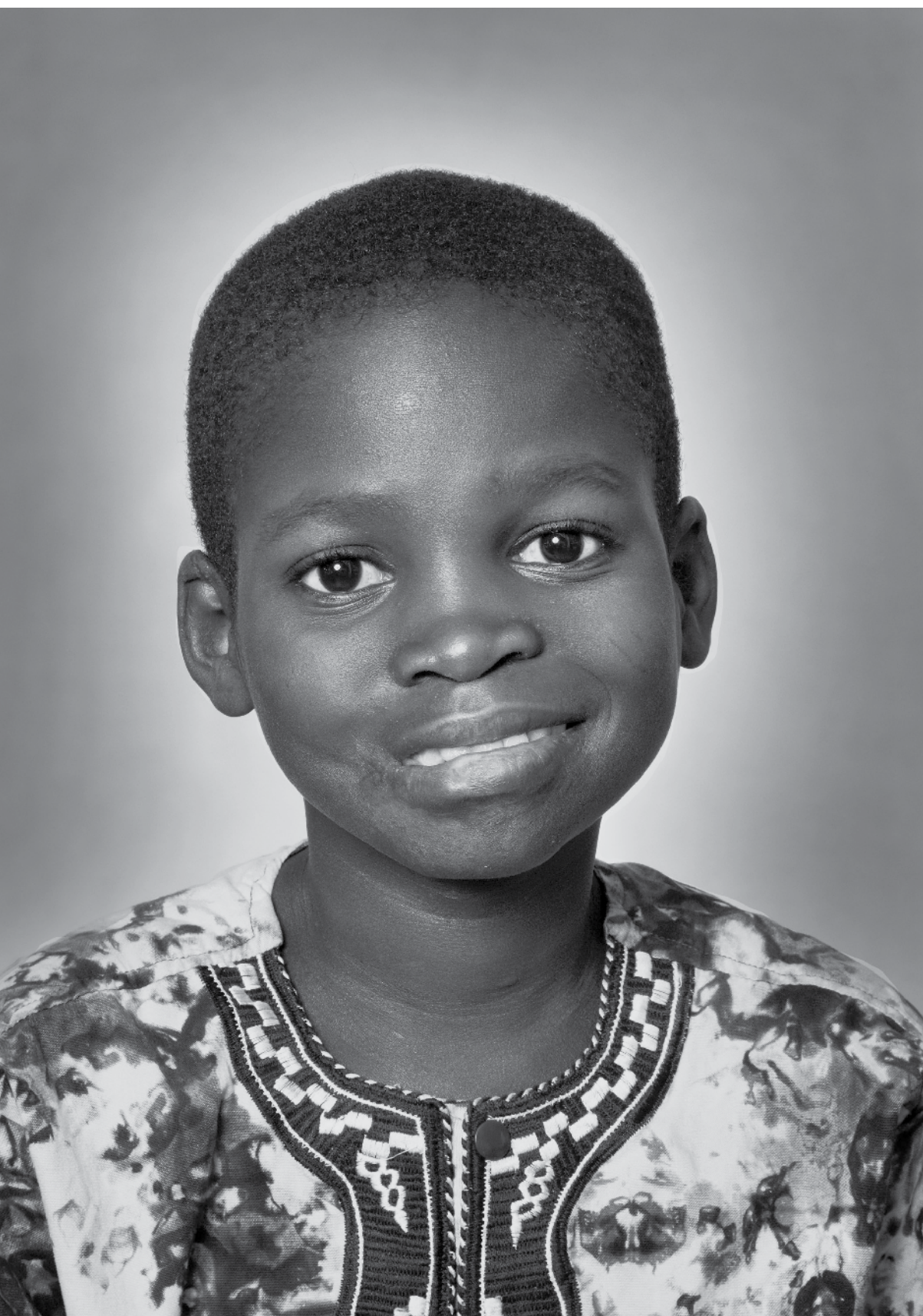


THE NEWSPAPER

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# Sentinelles

To the rescue of wounded innocence



**Madagascar**  
A tumultuous life

**Niger**  
Early marriages

**Switzerland**  
An unusual  
exhibition



## Editorial

### On the road to autonomy, Sentinelles' challenges in Madagascar

I was overwhelmed by emotion as I set foot on Malagasy soil, the fascinating country where Sentinelles runs programmes to support people in extremely vulnerable situations. Madagascar faces many economic, social and environmental challenges that contribute to a precarious humanitarian situation. A large part of the population are subsistence farmers. However, climate hazards, land degradation and deforestation mean that this activity is no longer viable. Madagascar has one of the highest acute malnutrition rates highest in the world, health infrastructure is inadequate, and many people lack access to basic healthcare. Access to drinking water and adequate sanitation, particularly in rural areas, remains a major challenge. In January 2024, the World Bank and UNESCO estimated that 94% of 10-year-olds were unable to read and understand a text adapted to their age, illustrating educational poverty. Against this backdrop, the valiant Sentinelles team provides support, guidance, care and encouragement to many children and entire families on their path to self-sufficiency. They offer two doctors, social services, a reception centre, training courses, remedial education, literacy classes, and the list goes on. I watch in awe as our staff get stuck in huge traffic jams, wade through stagnant water or mud to reach a family living in the capital's 'slums' or travel along impossible roads to reach an isolated village to offer their support. Their strength lies not only in their experience and perseverance, but also in their ability to combine their efforts with those of other members of civil society, with a view to guaranteeing human rights - rights that do not stop at the prison gate, as you will read in this issue. I pay tribute to their unfailing commitment and invite you all to support Sentinelles' activities, whether with your time, your resources or your voice.



Marlyse Morard  
Director

## SWITZERLAND

### Arrival in Switzerland of a young Malagasy

14-year-old Fenohery, suffers from the after-effects of burns to his face following an accident in a market when he was 3 years old. He has undergone various operations in his country, but now he needs to travel to Switzerland to improve certain facial functions. He needs surgery so that he can open his mouth more easily, breathe better through his nostrils and feel less tension around his eyes.

The teenager had a good trip, accompanied by Air Sans Frontières personnel who enjoyed getting to know him. Fenohery is a smiling and communicative boy. We welcomed him at Geneva to take him to La Maison de Terre des Hommes Valais where he will live between his stays in hospital.

We wish him the best for his medical care and express our deep gratitude to the Department of Plastic, Aesthetic and Reconstructive Surgery of the University Hospitals of Geneva where the teenager will be operated on free of charge as part of our collaboration agreement.



## COLOMBIA

### A holiday by the sea for our children in Colombia

From 25 to 29 November 2024, thirty children from the Minas home discovered the beauty of the Caribbean Sea, a first for most of them. This stay, financed by Swiss donations and several Colombian companies, combined relaxation and learning. Between swimming, ecological hikes and evenings around campfires, the children bonded, learned to collaborate and plotted their goals, strengthening their self-confidence and self-reflection. These precious opportunities for sharing allowed them to develop their social and emotional skills while teaching them the importance of respect and living in a group. An unforgettable interlude, the result of a collective commitment, which will remain engraved in their hearts. A huge thank you to the donors and corporate partners who made this dream come true.



## BURKINA FASO

### Raising awareness in schools



The Sentinelles team in Burkina Faso has initiated oral health awareness sessions in primary schools. An animated film retracing the journey of a girl with noma allows the team to broach the subject of the disease with children and convey prevention messages, with the specific aim of promoting good dental hygiene. Poor hygiene is one of the main factors, combined with malnutrition and a weak immune system, which can create a breeding ground for pathogenic bacteria to grow in children's mouths. The screenings are followed by a brief discussion and questions and answers about what the children have understood from the film and about the subject. Judging by the attention and enthusiasm of the schoolchildren to respond, we have strong hopes that the message has been well received!



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## SWITZERLAND

### Thank you Cédric Pescia and Nicolas Comi

« Incredible! » This was the word on everyone's lips at the end of the concert last January, by the pianists from our local region, Cédric Pescia and his student, Nicolas Comi, whose future looks very bright. These exceptional artists offered a memorable performance in the magnificent Paderewski hall of the Casino de

Montbenon, almost full. This musical moment, rich in emotion, won over the audience as well as Sentinelles. All profits will be donated to our programmes for children in extremely vulnerable situations. We would like to express our sincere thanks to all those who attended.



## NIGER Child marriage

In Niger, Sentinelles' activities are primarily based on medical care and social support for children with noma disease. In their work with local communities, our teams regularly come across widespread practices which present dangers for the health and development of our young beneficiaries. A recurrent problem is that of child marriage. Without claiming to deal with the subject in its entirety, the following article gives some insight on this phenomenon in Niger.

### State of play

Worldwide, child marriage is still practiced in many countries. According to the organization «Girls not brides», which specializes in combatting this practice, one in five girls in the world marry before the age of 18. Prevalence is highest among sub-Saharan African countries, with Niger coming top of the ranking. In fact, in this country, 76% of young women get married before the

age of 18 and 28% even before the age of 15<sup>1</sup>. In addition, in the Zinder region where our reception centre is located, 87% of girls marry before the age of 18, which is much higher than the national average. And what about the boys? Only 6% of them marry before the age of 18. From a legal point of view, Niger stands out for having set the minimum age of marriage in its Civil Code at 15 years for girls and 18 years for boys. This has led to it being regularly taken to task by international institutions because the country has ratified two conventions<sup>2</sup> that set the minimum age of marriage at 18. But in Niger, most marriages are celebrated under customary or religious law, that do not set a minimum age. As a result, girls are sometimes given in marriage as early as 11 or 12 years old.

### Why so young?

There are many causes of early marriage for girls. Poverty and religion are regularly cited as the main causes. However, it would appear that religion is not a determining factor, since early marriage affects all the religions present in Niger, more or less equally. Similarly, all

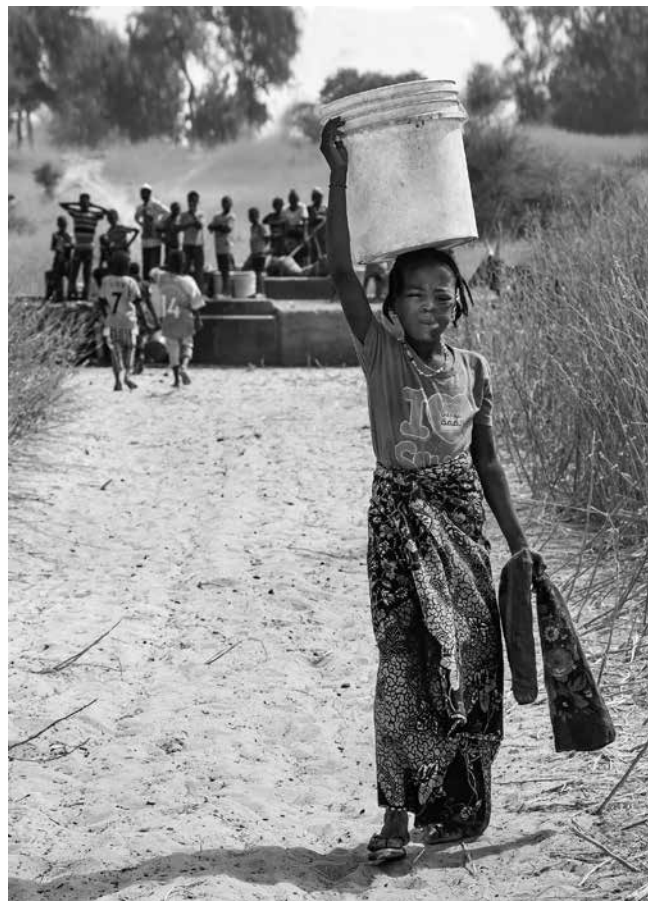
ethnic groups are affected by the phenomenon. As far as poverty is concerned, it certainly influences the rate of child marriage insofar as marrying off one's daughter reduces the number of mouths to feed and can bring wealth, depending on the husband chosen. However, a report by the Iris Group<sup>3</sup> shows that the reasons for child marriage are more socio-cultural than economic. For example, one of the reasons most often cited by parents in Niger to explain why they marry off their daughters so young is the need to protect them at all costs from an early pregnancy that would bring shame on the family and lead to it being shunned by the community and create great economic and moral difficulties for the care of their daughter-mother. Marrying as early as possible protects families from such complications.

1. UNICEF data.

2. International Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990, African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child in 1996.

3. Iris Group, Child, early and forced marriage, a political economy analysis of Niger, June 2020





© Frédéric Léandre Sossou

### And what about Sentinelles?

Our team works on a daily basis with the families of young women who have been affected by noma as children, and because of the context their parents raise the issue of their daughters' marriage with our social workers, before they reach the age of 15. When the girls bear the after-effects of the disease, an additional parameter comes into play, as it is sometimes difficult for them to find a husband. This makes it difficult for parents to refuse the first interested suitor, for fear that no one else will come forward later.

**When parents broach the subject with our social workers, we start a dialogue with the families with the aim of delaying this stage. Families are supported in the schooling and vocational training of their daughters, and we explain the importance of education for their development and for being able to support their families later on.** The plea is not always heard, as there is a great deal of social pressure in the community. Customs die hard, and school is no longer really seen as a social elevator. However every year is a year gained, and we know that an educated girl has a strong chance of becoming a future community leader. She'll be one more voice in changing attitudes and enabling her own daughters to begin their lives as wives and mothers... a little later.



## MADAGASCAR

### Fenosoa's story

Sentinelles' support is unique in that the assistance to be provided is decided on a case-by-case basis. While some of the inmates we meet in prison only need our help to meet their basic needs inside, others will need support after their release to find work and/or housing, for example. Whenever necessary, more holistic support can be provided, until people gradually manage to stand on their own two feet. We met Fenosoa<sup>1</sup> at Antanimora prison where we work to help juvenile inmates, pregnant women and mothers, sometimes accompanied by their children, reintegrate into society. When she was sent to prison, Fenosoa<sup>1</sup> was pregnant and accompanied by her two 4-year-old twins. Following her release, we have continued to support her and her family. Fenosoa agreed to tell her story.

*My name is Fenosoa, mother of twins of opposite sexes, Tsiky and Ravo. I entered Antanimora prison with them, and I was also 4 months pregnant. My husband was also there because we committed a robbery together. We were sentenced to 6 months, but we benefited from a presidential pardon which shortened our sentences.*

*I've had a pretty tumultuous life. After my first marriage, I could have hoped for a good life because my husband had a well-paid*

*job, and he came from a stable family. I gave birth to my first child who died a few months after birth. This unfortunate event was the beginning of my problems. Firstly, it led to my husband applying for divorce because he believed that I was just a curse for his family. Then, after this separation, I went back to my parents' house which they found difficult to bear, claiming that I was a disgrace to them.*

*Since I studied and am qualified to be a teacher, I decided to leave the family circle to start a new life. I got a job as a teacher and was able to rent a house. In the meantime, I thought I would find love again and got back together with a man with whom I had a little boy, but in the end, it didn't work out and he left. So, I decided to go back to live with my parents once again. They did not accept this and told me to go away and leave the child with them for his safety. Having no choice, I accepted this decision.*

*From then on, I started to lead a life of debauchery, I had the twins, and then I stayed with the father of the last child I was carrying when I arrived in prison. We lived on the street, under the arcades of the central market in the capital and that's where we stole a computer, which was the reason for our incarceration.*



*The Sentinelles social workers, as part of the preparations for childbirth and my social reintegration, wanted to get the twins out of the prison<sup>2</sup>. They visited my parents' home, who still refuse to have any contact with me. So, I agreed to their moving out of the prison to go and live in the foundation's reception centre.*

*Unfortunately, it was not the end of my troubles because during a medical examination at the prison, I found out that I had a serious illness. I couldn't believe it, I felt the sky falling on my head, had only negative thoughts and feared above all for the future of my children. During this period, I was very touchy and became very difficult to live with.*

*My fellow inmates and the Sentinelles team supported me a lot in dealing with this painful situation and, by listening to them, I felt confident and started a treatment to deal with it. At the same time, the Sentinelles social worker did everything she could to ensure that my delivery went smoothly and to find a nurse at the hospital who took good care of me. A girl was born by caesarean section.*

*Before our release from prison, last November, Sentinelles had already prepared everything for us to move into a new house. For this new start, we chose to live in a suburb of Antananarivo that I knew well. A house was already ready, as well as the basic equipment for our daily lives. My husband was very thin and weak when he left prison<sup>2</sup>, the social worker feared that he was suffering from tuberculosis. He was screened for the disease, but thank God, he was clear.*

*Currently, my daughter and I are being monitored by a doctor and the twins are still benefiting from supervision and schooling at the Sentinelles reception centre. What remains to be done is, on the one hand, to get our income-generating activity, selling charcoal, off the ground again. This aid should gradually enable us to stand on our own two feet. On the other hand, we must prepare for the twins' return to our home, to rebuild our family life.*

*What can I say about my difficult journey? Life has a lot of surprises in store for us, shocks, but also opportunities. I did not expect to meet people with such good will while I was in prison. Thank you to the foundation's donors and huge thanks to the entire team who have supported me and continue to give us strength.*  
AK



We are looking for clothes for children and teenagers aged 0 to 16 as part of our various programmes. Please drop them off at our offices at Rue du Bugnon 42, 6th floor, 1020 Renens.

Thank you very much!

1. All names are fictitious

2. Children above 18 months of age cannot stay in prison

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## SWITZERLAND

### An unusual exhibition

To mark 45 years of commitment, Sentinelles is taking over the Forum de l'Hôtel de Ville in Lausanne with an auditory exhibition. This innovative event offers visitors an immersive experience, where each image on display is accompanied by a podcast revealing the history of the people or objects it represents.

Through this exhibition, Sentinelles aims to immerse the public in the lives of the people it supports. These intimate encounters reveal inspiring life stories, challenges overcome and the impact of our mission in the various countries where we are present.

We would be delighted to meet you at the opening of this singular exhibition, scheduled for May 20, 2025, to offer you a unique experience and to share thoughts and ideas over some light refreshments.

#### Opening details

Date: Tuesday, May 20, 2025

Location: Forum de l'Hôtel de Ville,  
Place de la Palud 2, 1003 Lausanne

Time: 5:30 p.m.

The exhibition is on display until Thursday, June 5, 2025.

Other events will enrich this anniversary at the Forum de l'Hôtel de Ville: a round table on noma, the presentation of our programmes by our managers, an evening with our representative from Burkina Faso – Abdoulaye Doulogou – who will travel to Switzerland especially for the occasion, and many other surprises that can be discovered on our website. L.M

#### Would you like to get involved?

Sentinelles is looking for volunteers to help us make this event a success. Whether it is for welcoming visitors or logistics, your precious help will be greatly appreciated. Come and discover the behind-the-scenes of a foundation that works with people in extremely vulnerable situations and actively participate in a great adventure by writing to us at [events@sentinelles.org](mailto:events@sentinelles.org) or by calling us on 021 646 19 46.

# Sentinelles

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