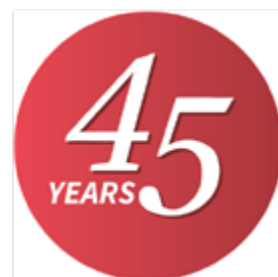


# Sentinelles

To the rescue of wounded innocence



**Burkina Faso**

Fruitful  
collaborations

**Democratic  
Republic of the  
Congo**

Help during  
a humanitarian crisis

**Colombia**

Women in  
the spotlight

## Editorial

### Can you hear their voices?

On 14 February 2025, M23 rebel forces backed by Rwandan troops entered Bukavu, the second largest city in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, without encountering any resistance, as the national army retreated, abandoning their weapons and uniforms. Since then, fear and chaos have reigned and night-time murders have become rife. In the early hours of the morning, the astonished inhabitants discover lifeless bodies lying in full view. No one is able to determine the exact circumstances of these murders, which will probably go unpunished. There are no prisons, no courts and hardly any police. Several months after the takeover of Bukavu, the security and humanitarian situation remains dire. In June, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, described in Geneva “the scale and range of human rights violations and abuses are horrendous”. Will other voices be raised to denounce them? Today we are speaking out for children and women whose physical and mental integrity has been damaged, for young men who have been forcibly conscripted and for entire families who have been shattered.

As you will read in this issue, this deep crisis is not new. The exploitation of the region’s natural resources is fuelling a vicious cycle of suffering for the local population. The international community must make a firm commitment to lasting peace, based on justice and respect for human rights.

And how, in these times of endless tragedies, can we fail to mention the plight of Gaza? How can we find the words to say that our anger remains unabated, that our solidarity knows no bounds? When a nation lives through an ordeal of this magnitude, the international community’s response is absolutely vital. Over 25 years ago, Edmond Kaiser, founder of Sentinelles, was already calling on the Government to react to contempt for human values. Exceptionally today we are publishing two letters: the first one, which we addressed to Federal Councillor, Ignazio Cassis, urging Switzerland to ensure respect for international law and access to humanitarian aid for the entire population of Gaza; and the second, his official response, which is particularly reserved, and painfully lacking in commitment.

Far from accepting defeat, we believe that words and actions still have the power to change the course of history. Faithful to our values, we will continue to bear witness, to act, and to join forces with our partners in defending human dignity.

With our thanks for your highly appreciated contribution to our efforts.



A stylized, handwritten signature in dark ink.

**Marlyse Morard**  
Director

## MADAGASCAR

### Lalao’s tough fight

A mother of nine, Lalao has been sentenced to twenty years in prison for a crime she did not commit: her phone was used without her knowledge in a murder case. She was locked up in June 2023 with her youngest child, Ny Aina, but is still fighting with Sentinelles by her side. Her sentence has shaken her to the core and she worries about her children’s future. Not all of their respective fathers are supportive. Ny Aina, often ill, ended up in the care of his grandparents, while her eldest children are supported in a boarding school. Whilst in detention, Lalao has been taking an active part in the sewing and basket-making workshops on offer. She does odd jobs in order to send a little money home to her family. Recently, she had to leave the room reserved for the beneficiaries of Sentinelles to join an overcrowded cell. Despite everything, the young woman remains courageous and hopes to have her sentence reduced. Sentinelles continues to support her in her efforts.

M.P.



Our contributor Magali Portillo with Angelah (suffering from bone tuberculosis) and her sister Stellah. The family is monitored by Sentinelles as part of the childcare programme.





## NIGER

### Self-sufficient thanks to sewing

Saadia was born in 2007 in a village in the Tahoua region of Niger. When she arrived, aged 9, at the Sentinelles reception centre in Zinder, a large town in the South of the country, she was in the acute phase of noma. She had lost part of her right jawbone, creating a fistula in her palate. Thanks to rapid care and a minor operation, the cleft has now been filled and Saadia has no visible after-effects of the disease. After her operation, the young woman took a vocational training course in dressmaking, which enabled her to start a business in her village. She now works in

her own workshop at home. In a small room made available by her family, this young Nigerien woman sews clothes for her friends and family, but also for her customers. Her business is even becoming a family affair, as she trains her younger sister in dressmaking, so that she can take over when Saadia travels. A great success story for Saadia, who has been supported by Sentinelles on her journey towards independence.

C.H.



## BURKINA FASO

### Working together to prevent and repair

Since 2018, Sentinelles has been working alongside La Chaîne de l'Espoir (an organisation that improves access to surgery for vulnerable people), La Voix du Paysan (a community radio station) and Bilaadga (an association dedicated to caring for disadvantaged children), all from Burkina Faso. This project was carried out in two phases over seven years.

**Raising awareness in the community, as well as among healthcare staff, contacting the sick, and then supporting them from their first appointment to completing effective treatment: all these aspects have been covered thanks to an integrated approach and collaboration with specialised associations. Each partner has been able to share its expertise with all the other members of the project.**

No fewer than ten regions of Burkina Faso have benefited from three main areas of intervention on facial pathologies:

- capacity building on these diseases, among local stakeholders, partner radio stations, health centre staff and traditional healers.
- lobbying opinion makers and raising awareness in the community about the causes of noma, means

of prevention, the pathologies and disfigurements it causes, and detecting affected children.

- providing training for local medical teams, treatment of patients, and post-operative follow-up, including psychosocial support.

#### Key figures:

During the first phase of the project, 1,278 professionals from 513 health and social promotion centres (HSPC) were trained. During the second phase, 1,355 health workers from 450 HSPC's, 1,185 community health workers (CHW) and 558 traditional healers also received training. Over seven years, the project has enabled 1,253 patients to undergo a medical examination and 765 to benefit from medical treatment or surgery.

Behind each figure lies a life story, a unique journey to access care. One such story is that of Dieudonné, told here by his grandmother.

#### Dieudonné, the ravages of fire

It was one of those mornings when everyone was working in the fields to bring in the harvest. Little Dieudonné, aged 2 at the time, felt cold. So he went off on his own to sit on a large stone by the fire, a habit shared by his whole family. A passer-by told him to go back inside to warm up, which he did before going back out to sit on the

same rock. On his return, the man saw two little feet in the air in the middle of the courtyard but couldn't hear any screaming. And for good reason, Dieudonné had his face buried in the embers. When he took the child out of the fire, he found his skin was burning like paper, detached from his head. "It was horrifying", recalls his grandmother. She remembers that Dieudonné's mother refused to eat for three days and cried until she fell ill. The village blacksmiths, who hold the secret of fire, smeared his face with guinea fowl eggs and used their bellows to try to soothe his pain. Dieudonné was then taken to a dispensary, where he stayed for around ten days before returning to his home. **When the family finally learned that there was a mission in Ouagadougou, the little boy was able to go there and receive new, adapted care.** While his grandmother is delighted with the result, she would also like to see her grandson's nose 'repaired'.

It will take several more operations to reduce the scars left by the fire on Dieudonné's face. Unfortunately, due to the worsening security situation in the east of the country, it hasn't been possible to set a date for the little boy's next operations. We will keep in touch with him until his face is fully restored.

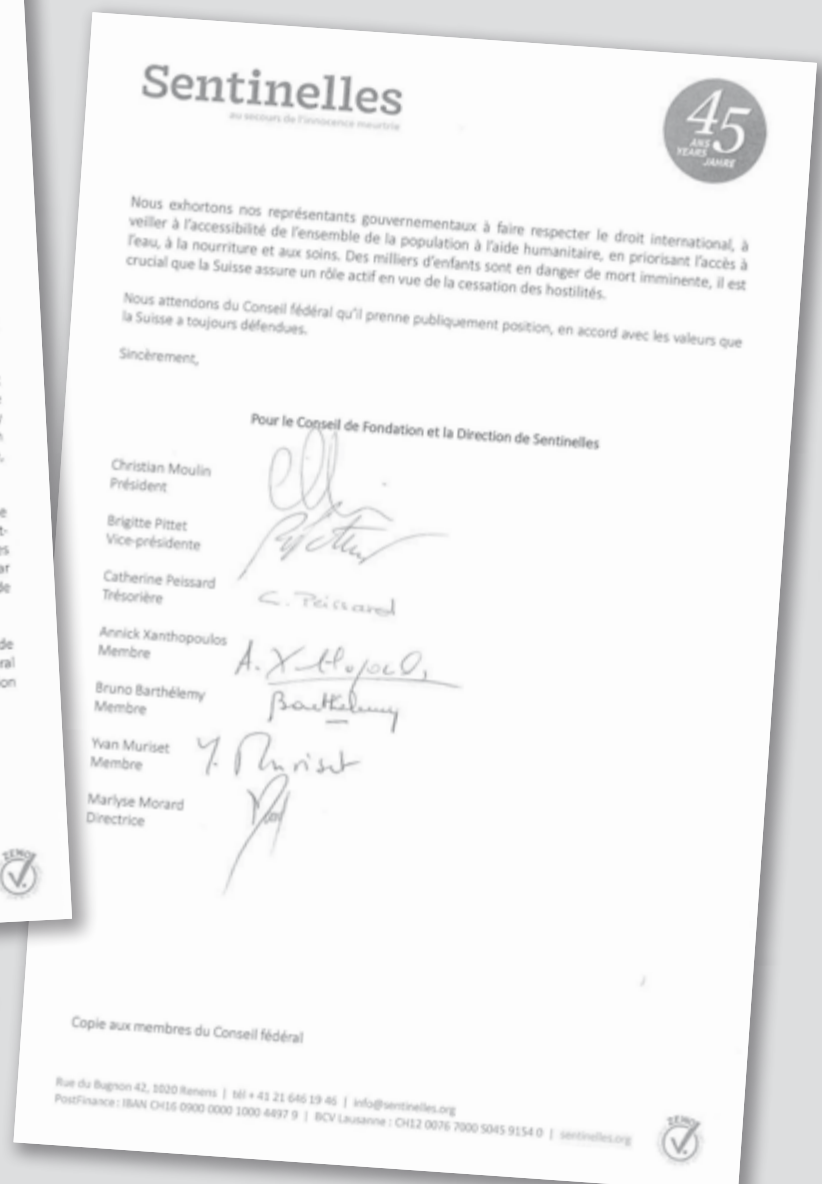
V.E.

# CALL TO ACTION FOR GAZA

In light of our commitment to human rights, we recently addressed a letter to Mr. Ignazio Cassis, the current Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAE), urging him to take a stand to ensure access to humanitarian aid to Gaza. You can read the letter here, along with the official response, which demonstrates the spineless position of the Swiss Government. The letters are presented in their original versions, accompanied by a translation to facilitate reading.



Letter sent to Mr. Ignazio Cassis, 3 June 2025





# CALL TO ACTION FOR GAZA



Source : Wikimedia Commons

## **Humanitarian situation in Gaza, call for action from the Federal Council of Switzerland**

*Renens, 3 June 2025*

*Your Excellency Minister of Foreign Affairs,*

*Founded in 1980 by Edmond Kaiser, Fondation Sentinelles is dedicated to providing essential relief and support to vulnerable people in dire need, particularly women and children. We watch over them and empower them to overcome the injustice and inequality they face.*

*On 7 October 2023, we were shocked by the Hamas terrorist attack which left hundreds dead and many taken hostage. We are also horrified and shocked by the tragic situation that has prevailed in the Gaza Strip over the past 19 months. Suffering has reached unprecedented levels, sparing no-one, regardless of age or background. The people of Gaza are being subjected to extreme levels of violence. They are being slaughtered, maimed, starved and deprived of humanitarian aid. The population is literally being wiped out.*

*The moderate, even lenient, position of the Swiss government, is at the very least incomprehensible and completely fails to measure up to our responsibilities as the Depository of the Geneva Conventions. Is Switzerland not duty-bound to denounce the atrocious crimes being committed in the Palestinian territories, support victims and call for strict compliance with international humanitarian law, which is being violated on a daily basis by the Israeli government? Thousands of children are in imminent danger of death, and unrestricted access to humanitarian aid must be restored immediately.*

*We join together with all European countries, non-governmental organisations, and citizens' groups, to demand that you condemn Israel's policy of aggression and decry its attempts at territorial expansion, in the strongest possible terms.*

*We urge our government representatives to ensure that international law is upheld and that the entire population has access to humanitarian aid, especially access to water, food and healthcare. Thousands of children are in imminent danger of death, and it is crucial that Switzerland plays an active role in bringing about a cessation of hostilities.*

*We expect the Federal Council to take a public stand in line with the values that Switzerland has always upheld.*

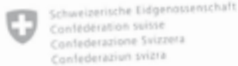
*Yours sincerely,*

**On behalf of the Director and Members of the Council of Fondation Sentinelles.**

**Christian Moulin, President**  
**Brigitte Pittet, Vice-Chair**  
**Catherine Peissard, Treasurer**  
**Annick Xanthopoulos, Council Member**  
**Bruno Barthélemy, Council Member**  
**Yvan Muriset, Council Member**  
**Marlyse Morard, Director**

**cc: Swiss Federal Council Ministers**

# CALL TO ACTION FOR GAZA



Le Chef du Département fédéral des affaires étrangères DFAE

CIT-3003.Berne.DFAE.JC

**Courrier A**  
Fondation Sentinelles  
Rue du Bugnon 42  
CH-1020 Renens

Berne, le 2 juillet 2025

Votre lettre du 3 juin 2025

Mesdames, Messieurs,

Je vous remercie pour votre courrier du 3 juin 2025. Je partage votre profonde préoccupation face aux souffrances intolérables de la population civile à Gaza et dans le Territoire palestinien occupé.

Le 23 mai, j'ai adressé un message à la population, réaffirmant l'impérieuse nécessité d'une aide humanitaire immédiate et expliquant que la Suisse avait intensifié ses efforts diplomatiques, sur les plans bilatéral et multilatéral, afin de contribuer à mettre un terme à cette situation indicible. Le Conseil fédéral a communiqué ainsi le 28 mai 2025. Pour faire face à la situation humanitaire catastrophique, le Conseil fédéral avait décidé, le 21 mai dernier déjà, d'allouer 20 millions de francs supplémentaires au financement de l'aide humanitaire.

La position du Conseil fédéral est claire : nous condamnons fermement les graves violations du droit international humanitaire commises tant par le Hamas que par Israël. Nous appelons à un cessez-le-feu immédiat et durable, à un accès humanitaire rapide, sûr et sans entrave, ainsi qu'à la libération immédiate et inconditionnelle de tous les otages.

Lors de mon récent voyage dans le Territoire palestinien occupé et en Israël, les 10 et 11 juin, j'ai rencontré à Ramallah le Premier ministre et ministre des affaires étrangères palestinien Muhammad Mustafa, puis à Jérusalem le ministre israélien des affaires étrangères Gideon Sa'ar. Avec eux, nous avons discuté en détail de la situation humanitaire à Gaza, des défis politiques dans la région et des perspectives de paix. J'ai également rencontré de hauts représentants de l'ONU et du CICR qui travaillent dans la bande de Gaza. Toutes les parties ont convenu que l'aide humanitaire restait largement insuffisante. J'ai réaffirmé les obligations qui incombent à Israël en tant que puissance occupante et la nécessité de garantir un accès humanitaire rapide, sûr et sans entrave, ainsi que l'impératif de protéger la population civile.

La position de la Suisse dans le conflit au Proche-Orient est marquée par la continuité : elle s'appuie depuis toujours sur le droit international et les paramètres convenus au niveau international, y compris les résolutions du Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU. Le Conseil fédéral soutient dès lors la vision du Conseil de sécurité d'une région où deux États démocratiques, Israël et la Palestine, vivent côte à côte en paix à l'intérieur de frontières sûres et reconnues. La Suisse est convaincue que seule une solution négociée

Palais fédéral ouest, CH-3003 Berne  
www.dfae.admin.ch

entre les parties, conforme au droit international, peut concrétiser cette vision. Fidèle à sa tradition de bons offices et de promotion du droit international, elle s'engage depuis des années en faveur d'un processus de négociation menant à une paix juste et durable entre Israéliens et Palestiniens.

Je vous prie d'agréer, Mesdames et Messieurs, l'assurance de ma considération distinguée.

Ignazio Cassis  
Conseiller fédéral

Response from Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis, 2 July 2025

# CALL TO ACTION FOR GAZA

Bern, 2 July 2025

**Re: Your letter dated 3 June 2025**

Dear Directors and Council Members,

Thank you for your letter dated 3 June 2025. I share your deep concern regarding the intolerable suffering faced by civilians in Gaza and the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

On 23 May, I informed the Swiss people of the vital need for immediate humanitarian aid, stating that Switzerland had stepped up its diplomatic efforts, both bilaterally and multilaterally, with a view to resolving this unspeakable situation. This statement was issued by the Federal Council on 28 May 2025. The Federal Council had already decided to allocate an additional CHF 20 million in humanitarian aid on 21 May, in response to the catastrophic humanitarian situation.

The Federal Council's position is clear: we strongly condemn the serious violations of international humanitarian law committed by both Hamas and Israel. We call for an immediate and lasting ceasefire, rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access, and the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages.

During my recent trip to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and Israel, on 10 and 11 June, I met with the Palestinian Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Muhammad Mustafa, in Ramallah, and Israeli Foreign Minister, Gideon Sa'ar, in Jerusalem. We held in-depth discussions on the humanitarian situation in Gaza, the political challenges

in the region and the prospects for peace. I also met with senior representatives from the UN and the ICRC based in Gaza. All parties agreed that humanitarian assistance remains wholly inadequate. I reaffirmed Israel's obligations as the occupying power and the need to ensure rapid, safe and unhindered access to humanitarian aid, as well as the duty to protect the civilian population.

Switzerland's position in the Middle East conflict is characterised by consistency: it has always been founded on international law and internationally agreed parameters, including UN Security Council resolutions. The Federal Council, therefore, supports the Security Council's vision of two democratic states, Israel and Palestine, living peacefully side by side, within secure and recognised borders. Switzerland is convinced that only a negotiated solution between the parties, in accordance with international law, can make this vision a reality. In keeping with our tradition as facilitators and promoters of international law, we have for many years been committed to a negotiating process, that will lead to a just and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

Yours faithfully,

**Ignazio Cassis**  
**Member of the Federal Council**

Source : Wikimedia Commons





# THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

## A Silent Humanitarian Crisis

For over thirty years, the eastern regions of the Democratic Republic of Congo has been plagued by violence between armed groups and national government forces. The clashes intensified in 2024, as did the atrocities.

Today, some 120 armed groups are fighting over territories. Sweeping advances in 2025 enabled them to take control of several areas, including in the North and South Kivu regions. The east of the country has become a lawless place where constant fear reigns. This compounds the instability in the country, where mass violations of human rights have been committed.

As a result, thousands of displaced families have been left without shelter, access to drinking water, healthcare or education. The illegal and systematic exploitation of natural resources – including gold, coltan and cobalt - stokes tension, which affects local communities.

### A population undergoing a dreadful ordeal

Ongoing clashes between armed groups and Congolese national forces are preventing the basic needs of the local population from being met. North Kivu, known for its excellent agricultural production, is facing meagre harvests. Armed conflicts, looting and forced displacements are making the land inaccessible. Family farming, the main source of subsistence, is collapsing, which exacerbates food insecurity. Markets are deserted, supply chains have broken down, and the price of basic foodstuffs is skyrocketing. People are having to fend for themselves, in the face of the worst scenarios. Malnutrition, already present before the fighting, is on a worrying upsurge. Vaccination campaigns have been suspended, depriving children of essential preventive care. The mental health of communities has also been badly affected. Millions are now suffering from trauma without access to psychological support.



The Sentinelles team assesses the state of housing in the region.

### Our team, resilient in the midst of turmoil

Our team has been active in Bukavu (South Kivu) since 2008, supporting women and children living in extremely precarious conditions. It focuses on nutrition, medical care, assistance with housing, schooling, vocational training and setting up income-generating activities. Following the takeover of the town of by armed groups, our team has redirected its actions in the province, in order to reduce its risks and those of the people it supports. Growing insecurity has made certain areas inaccessible. Despite these difficulties, we remain mobilised and are doing everything we can to maintain links with the families. Most of the women we support are difficult to reach. But thanks to the commitment of health staff, teachers, village chiefs and communities, we have managed to get news of beneficiaries.

To meet the most urgent needs, we have set up a permanent food distribution service in our premises. This allows women to come and stock up while waiting for the situation to improve. As far as possible, we are also continuing to provide medical care and schooling for the children we care for.

We are deeply concerned for our colleagues, the families we monitor and all the communities affected. The country is going through a major humanitarian and security crisis, with internal displacements. The judicial system remains largely deficient and impunity is rife.

Yet this conflict remains silent and invisible, both in the media and among the international community. Ending impunity, protecting civilians and committing to lasting peace based on justice and respect for human rights have become an absolute priority.

M.V.V.



## COLOMBIA

### Together, women reinventing their future

In 2025, Sentinelles launched an uplifting project in Amagá, a mining region racked by insecurity, social inequalities and gender-based violence. The programme, carried out in partnership with Sentinelles Fribourg, aims to empower rural women economically and psychosocially. Our aims are to provide them

with vocational training, access to entrepreneurship, regular psychological support and raise awareness of their rights, so that they can improve their living conditions and assert their independence. By also involving the men in the community in the programme, we hope to sow the seeds of profound societal

change. We are trying to help transform gender relations in a region still too often marked by patriarchy and male domination. Our hope? That this project will open new doors for women and help build a society where they can fully claim their rights!

C.D.

## SWITZERLAND

### A Senegalese girl now just like any other



Mariama is an adorable four-year-old girl with intense eyes. She suffers from a serious congenital heart defect, which cannot be operated on in her country. Without appropriate intervention, this malformation leads to heart failure, which will stunt her growth and development, and threaten her life in the short term.

Following examinations locally and meticulous preparation, her parents entrusted her to us in the hope that she can be treated and return to Senegal in good health.

Mariama made the long journey to Switzerland, accompanied by volunteers from Aviation Sans Frontières. On landing, she was met at Geneva airport by Sentinelles staff, and taken to Vaud University Hospital (CHUV) where she was cared for by a specialised team.

The operation, carried out a few weeks after her arrival, was successful.

After about ten days' convalescence, Mariama returned to the Terre des hommes residence in Massongex (VS), where she was warmly welcomed and will stay with other children, who, like her, came for treatment that is unavailable in their own countries.

A month after her first operation, the little girl underwent dental treatment under general anaesthetic. A reassuring post-operative check-up enabled Mariama to return home to her family at and get on with her life as a child. This time, like all the others, at last!

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to the CHUV, as well as all the people and organisations who contributed to this magnificent chain of solidarity. Thanks to them, Mariama has been able to rediscover what every child deserves: a life full of promise.

J.D.





## SWITZERLAND

### 45 years of solidarity at the Lausanne Forum

As part of its 45-year commitment to helping the most vulnerable, Sentinelles took over the Forum at Lausanne's City Hall for a series of special events in May and June: an auditory exhibition called 'Des vies à écouter' (Lives to be listened to), a round table discussion with noma specialists, a special African afterwork and a workshop for children.

The entire Sentinelles team would like to extend its warmest thanks to all those who came to share these moments of conviviality with us. Our thanks also go to Jean-Marc Richard

for his talent as a moderator, to the speakers at the round table who contributed brilliantly to the richness of the discussions, to the Burkinabè music group Yélémani, and to our invaluable volunteers.

The festivities will continue on Sunday 7 December 2025 with a charity concert. Further details to follow.

More than just a celebration, these events are an opportunity to cast a spotlight on the people we support and to rally around the values promoted by Sentinelles. With our determination intact, we look forward to the next 45 years of helping people who have been deeply wounded.

L.M.



The audio exhibition 'Des vies à écouter' is now available online on our website.

You can (re)listen to it here:

<https://www.sentinelles.org/exposition-auditive-podcasts/>

# Sentinelles

To the rescue of wounded innocence

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