

THE NEWSPAPER

N° 304 - February 2026

Sentinelles

To the rescue of wounded innocence



Colombia

Alongside the
Families of Miners

Madagascar

Working at the
Centre of the Riots

Switzerland

Oumou's
Long Journey

Editorial

From Burkina Faso to Colombia, the many faces of solidarity

Those who have crossed paths with Christiane Badel, volunteer and former president of Sentinelles, invariably note her tireless energy, her determination – to say the least – and her outspokenness. From the corridors of the highest authorities to dusty tracks, for nearly 40 years, she has been defending the rights of people who have been forgotten, children and women deprived of the basics. She has made their voices heard where they had none, while reaching out to the most vulnerable. The portrait we dedicate to her in this edition is but a modest tribute to the extent of her commitment.

Today, we see this commitment in contexts marked by profound crises. In Burkina Faso, thousands of families are still fleeing armed violence and taking refuge in already fragile urban areas. Upon their arrival, solidarity is expressed in a beautiful way. However, the generosity of host communities is waning as needs multiply. Together with its partners, Sentinelles is adapting to a particularly unstable environment and continuing its food and psychosocial support.

Elsewhere, other realities lurk in the shadows. In Colombia, men descend into coal mines every day, some of which are artisanal and outside state control. Conditions there are extremely harsh and dangerous. When an accident occurs, there is no social safety net or insurance for the injured or bereaved families. Behind the figures and the tonnes of ore extracted lie economic and above all human issues.

In the face of these complex situations, moments of grace remind us of the meaning of our actions. Sentinelles is also about moments of great intensity, such as Oumou's return to Senegal after delicate heart surgery, or the Ministrings charity concert that marked the foundation's 45th anniversary. A hall close to full, knowing glances, twirling bows, and the magic begins.

As you read these lines, two months will have passed since the tragedy in Crans-Montana. Our thoughts are with the victims, their loved ones, and with all those—here and elsewhere—whose lives are turned upside down in a matter of moments. True to our mission, we continue, through this newspaper, to shine a light on the acts of solidarity that speak to our shared humanity.



Solidarity can never be taken for granted, but with your support this beacon of hope will continue to burn brightly. Together, let's carry on fighting for the cause!

Marlyse Morard
Director



Photos © Sergio Maryl

In the midst of the riots, the Sentinelles team was able to continue its mission.

MADAGASCAR

Social work in times of crisis and instability

Amidst the political tensions that shook Madagascar last September, our staff on the ground had to deal with an exceptional situation, exacerbated by a prison service strike. At Antanimora prison, no movements, either in or out, were allowed – leaving women and children in detention in a very precarious situation. We reorganised our operations to ensure our mission could continue. We had to set up emergency duty rosters, with our social, educational and logistics teams working shifts around the clock. Despite the increased risk of looting and instability in certain neighbourhoods, we managed to ensure the delivery of essential food supplies to prisoners. This work helped to maintain a vital safety net. In the same spirit, we supplied food and medicine to our hospitalised patients to avoid any disruption to their care. Thanks to our teams' responsiveness, solidarity and sense of duty, the Sentinelles Foundation remained active on all possible fronts, even at the height of the crisis.

M.P.

BURKINA FASO

Support for displaced families

For several years, Burkina Faso has been facing attacks by armed terrorist groups, which have had a significant impact on people's daily lives. Insecurity has led to forced displacement, causing an unprecedented humanitarian crisis that remains one of the most neglected in the world.

Overcrowded cities

Most people fleeing violence end up in cities in different regions, including the capital. They often find themselves in outlying neighbourhoods, looking for a place to stay. Sometimes they are taken in by a family member or helped by neighbours who are willing to share their shelter and food. Most then rent houses in these neighbourhoods.

Sentinelles' continued field work

Since 2020, our foundation has developed a comprehensive project to help internally displaced persons living on the outskirts of Ouagadougou. Through our partnership with the social action organisation Sig-Noghin, we support around 60 different families each year.

We support local communities in several ways. In addition to distributing food aid and emergency relief supplies, our team assesses the different options for developing women-led income-generating activities. Most often, depending on their situation, they choose to set up small businesses, such as making and selling cakes, soap or other essential products. We make regular visits to these women, with a view to empowering them and their families. We offer management courses, a chance for them to raise any issues and awareness-raising activities, such as training in the preparation of enriched porridge for young children, as a way of combating malnutrition.



Sentinelles' commitments: supporting displaced people through emergency aid and small income-generating activities, and supporting children.

Giving children a voice

Sentinelles is committed to providing education and access to healthcare for children with certain complex health problems. Partnerships with psychologists enable us to set up both group discussions and individual consultations. Art therapists also organise activities with teenagers, such as dance, theatre and recycling plastics. The aim is to create shows and objects to sell in 2026.

V.E.

You can help us continue our commitment to these families in 2026.

Here's how:

- **Support food supplies:** a 100 kg bag of corn costs around CHF 40.-. To help a family of 10, 500 kg are needed for 3 months, at a cost of CHF 200.-
- **Support work:** to start an income-generating activity, equipment and raw materials costing between CHF 100.- and 150.- are needed.
- **Support education:** it is important that every child can go to school, either a state school or, if there is no state school in the neighbourhood, a private school. Annual school fees range from CHF 50.- to 100.-



Our team member Joëlle visited Oumou during her hospital stay.

SWITZERLAND

A new breath of life for Oumou

For the past year, a valuable partnership with the CHUV in Lausanne has enabled us to transfer children suffering from serious heart conditions that cannot be operated on in their country of origin to Switzerland. Thanks to this collaboration, we were able to welcome Oumou, a two-and-a-half-year-old girl who arrived from Senegal last June.

Her story

Oumou, the youngest of four children, has shown signs of a heart defect since birth. At the age of two, she was admitted to the CUOMO paediatric cardiology centre in Dakar so that doctors could determine the appropriate medical treatment. Faced with the high cost of tests, her family rallied round and set up a collection among their friends and family, but the costs quickly became too high. Oumou was then referred to Sentinelles.

A long preparation period in Senegal

Before her trip to Switzerland, several preparatory stages were necessary, each of which was essential to her well-being.

First, our social worker, Marie Agnès, conducted a thorough check on the family's circumstances and took charge of the necessary administrative procedures for a transfer to Switzerland, which had been decided on as an emergency by the medical team.

When the passport application was submitted, an error was detected in the child's birth certificate. The authorities then required the document to be corrected before continuing with the procedure. This step took time, while Oumou's health required rapid intervention. Once the situation had been resolved with the civil registry, the passport application and then the visa application were submitted.

Administrative and medical preparations in Switzerland

While waiting for Oumou at our foundation's headquarters, we took care of preparing all the administrative documents required to obtain her visa. We also sorted out her plane ticket and arranged for her to be escorted by volunteers from Aviation Sans Frontières, who would look after her throughout her journey from Dakar to Geneva.

Medical care at the CHUV was also arranged, through the paediatric

cardiology department. After arriving in Switzerland, Oumou was received at La Maison Terre des hommes in Massongex in Valais, a warm and reassuring place where she would be able to rest and recover after her treatment. For children in convalescence, this centre – run by a wonderful team of medical and education professionals – quickly becomes a haven of peace and tranquillity.

Flying into the unknown

Once everything was finally ready, Oumou flew from Dakar to Geneva. Our programme managers, Joëlle (Care in Switzerland) and Marta (Senegal), welcomed her on arrival and accompanied her to the CHUV hospital for her first medical examinations. Despite the upheaval of the journey – leaving her family, travelling on a long flight, meeting new people – Oumou showed great strength. We informed her worried mother that everything had gone well. Since then, we have been sending her regular updates to reassure her.

In Valais, Oumou showed how well she could adapt from her very first days at the home. After getting to know the care and education team, she made friends with the other children. Confident, she settled in at the nursery school. She happily took part in the activities on offer, such as a boat trip on Lake Geneva, which she loved.

Thorough examinations

The little girl gathered her strength to face a 48-hour hospital stay for a cardiac catheterisation procedure. This radiological examination, performed under general anaesthetic, provided a better understanding of the anatomy of her heart. The diagnosis made by ultrasound was



Very brave, Oumou never lost her smile throughout her stay.



At Geneva Airport, the little girl is looking forward to seeing her mother again soon.

confirmed: she has a ventricular septal defect, a small hole in the wall separating the two ventricles of the heart. This heart defect causes oxygen-rich blood to be pumped back to the lungs, leading to serious symptoms such as breathing difficulties and stunted growth. Eventually, she could suffer from heart failure.

Oumou therefore underwent surgery to close the ventricular septal defect. We stayed with her to support and reassure her before her operation, which went ahead without any major complications. Although tired after the surgery, the little girl greeted us with her beautiful smile, which is her strength and makes her so endearing. She spent another week at the CHUV before returning to the Terre des hommes home La Maison to continue her recovery.

Healing with support

Throughout her recovery, Oumou went for regular medical check-ups, in which volunteers' support played a vital role. People with cars offer their services and drive convalescing children from Valais to Lausanne for their appointments. They are an essential link in the chain of solidarity that makes this care possible.

During her check-ups, our presence alongside Oumou and the medical team helped to reassure her. We comforted her and entertained her with games and books. In this way, we have helped her to overcome these stressful moments. These small gestures have helped ease her anxieties and aid her recovery.

A joyful return

After three months of convalescence, Oumou had fully recovered and was ready to return to her family in Senegal. Upon her arrival in Dakar, she was welcomed by her loved ones and our social worker. There was a huge outpouring of joy at their reunion. A glance between Oumou and her big brother said it all. Her mother could not thank us enough, touched by how lucky her daughter was to have received treatment.

A few weeks later, Oumou celebrated her third birthday. We are delighted to see this little girl today, happy, full of life and ready to pick up her childhood again surrounded by her loved ones.

Thanks to the solidarity of everyone involved, from medical teams to volunteers and our partners, Oumou has recovered her health. Her bright smile and joie de vivre

will remain etched in our memories as a testament to the impact of this magnificent chain of solidarity.

Oumou, we wish you a life full of fun, laughter and good health. We are proud to have been able to accompany you on this journey.

J.D. and M.V.V.



After three months of recovery in Switzerland, Oumou was able to return to her mother's arms in Senegal.

COLOMBIA

The mines of Amagá: both vital and dangerous

In the Colombian town of Amagá, most households depend either directly or indirectly on coal mining. Income from the mine is often the only stable source of revenue for families, especially in rural areas. Unfortunately, this dependence makes households extremely vulnerable if accidents occur or there are economic fluctuations, given the lack of alternative job opportunities. The story of María José*, Diego* and their mother Victoria* clearly illustrates this situation.

A family in crisis

María José is 11 and Diego is 13. Six months ago, their father died in a small-scale mine in the region, in a firedamp explosion. He had worked there as a labourer for many years. His death soon took a huge toll on his wife, who had been a housewife until then, and his children.

María José and Diego gradually dropped out of school and spent long hours alone at home, while their mother struggled to cope with administrative procedures and grief. The family's isolation quickly worsened, making everyday life increasingly difficult. Psychologically exhausted, without any support or the possibility of quickly finding paid work, Victoria asked the Sentinelles Foundation to take her children into temporary care at the Minas home.

The first few weeks were quite stressful for the children, who spoke little and struggled to settle in. But little by little, thanks to the reassuring presence of the education team, they began to regain confidence and opened up to the other children. María José quickly showed a particular interest in manual activities and Diego threw himself into music lessons. The two of them are now participating in a gardening project: they plant herbs, tend them and then use them in recipes and meals at the home. This is a way of sharing their small harvest with their classmates.

The home has become a safe haven for María José and Diego, where they receive regular visits from their mother. Although their relationship remains fragile and still requires a great deal of work to rebuild it, these are precious opportunities for maintaining family ties.



At the Minas centre, our team listens closely to the children's needs and supports the activities they enjoy taking part in.

The psychosocial team also supports Victoria in dealing with administrative procedures, hunting for a job and her grieving process. Their work guarantees the whole family the food security and peace of mind they long for.

The State takes action

In Amagá, this case is far from being a one-off. In mining areas, the traditional economic model, focusing solely on mining, creates many difficulties. This is the context for the national level debate – led by President Gustavo Petro, the first left-wing president in Colombia's history – on a new mining policy, as well as an energy transition for the vast mining areas, such as Amagá. These discussions are focusing in particular on better regulation of mining operations, stricter safety requirements, protecting local communities and the need for economic diversification in mining regions. As far as families are concerned, these macroeconomic issues are not just institutional or political debates: they affect their financial security and well-being. This could bring them an opportunity to break out of this model of complete dependence on natural resource extraction.

Sentinelles' work

To support this transition, the foundation is stepping up its work with children, and indeed women, with a view to creating alternative sources of income. This is because very often, after the death of a miner, women (and mothers) have to take on the task of running the household alone. This is why in January 2025 we decided to increase our support for women in the region. We currently offer vocational training

(in sewing, cooking, beauty therapy, agriculture) to over 60 women from rural areas as well as workshops to raise awareness of their rights, personal development and self-confidence activities, and psychosocial support from a newly hired psychologist.

These actions aim to create income-generating alternatives that will make women and their families less vulnerable when things go wrong in the mining sector. The ultimate goal is for them to be able to develop small businesses (food shops, restaurants, hairdressing salons, etc.), which would provide a significant supplement to the family budget.

Towards a better future

The life stories of María José, Diego and Victoria show that although essential to the local economy, mining alone cannot provide a stable model for families. High risk exposure and a lack of alternative job opportunities continue to weaken Amagá's social fabric on a daily basis. Encouraging other activities, helping women become financially independent and strengthening child protection mechanisms are essential steps in reducing this structural dependence. These missions are at the heart of our team's work in Colombia. It is thanks to your support that these efforts can continue. This is why we wish to express our sincere gratitude to you.

C.D.

* Not their real names.



A truly moving concert with the Ministrings, in support of a worthy cause.

Thank you for your support!

The curtain has fallen on our 45th anniversary celebrations! The Ministrings charity concert held on 7 December at the Aula des Bergières in Lausanne was a resounding success. We cannot fail to express our deep gratitude to the public and our partners as we bring this anniversary year to a close. All donations collected will help malnourished children in our programmes to combat noma. Sentinelles remains as committed as ever to helping people in dire need.

L.M.

Sentinelles Fribourg is pleased to invite you to a **concert of classical and Colombian music**

featuring the duo Clea Bahous on piano and Brayan Andrés Ariza Puyo on trombone

Admission by donation in support of the new "Women in Colombia" project

on Sunday, 22 March 2026 at 5 p.m.

at the Centre Le Phénix in Fribourg

SentinellesFribourg
united in support



PORTRAIT OF AN ACTIVIST

'Here, each person is valued for who they are'

At 79, Christiane Badel is in great shape. A former national league basketball player and physical education teacher, she has kept every ounce of her vitality. Today, she is wearing a simple outfit all in pastel shades, reflecting her deep commitment, which has never needed grand speeches.

She was president of Sentinelles for 10 years, but her fight for the most disadvantaged began much earlier. In April 1987, the therapist who was treating her back mentioned that an organisation was looking for volunteers. She then met the man who would become her role model: Edmond Kaiser, a man whose heart and soul were totally devoted to the most vulnerable. Three months later, during the school holidays, Christiane set off for Senegal to set up the project for child-guides of blind persons.

'I feel lucky because Edmond trusted me,' she explains. As a result, around 40 children have been able to attend school instead of being forced to help their visually impaired parents beg. Sentinelles' holistic approach also offers support to parents so that families can provide for themselves. 'The results are wonderful! Some children have become artisans, others teachers or even school principals.' Christiane was also closely involved with a number of other Sentinelles programmes.

This individual approach to supporting people truly moved Christiane. 'Being part of the Sentinelles Foundation means being close to the people you support, giving them the opportunity to continue on their path without assistance.'

She carries out her missions during her holidays. Even as a child, she dreamed of becoming a nurse so she could help people in Africa. That dream has changed. She has not been treating illnesses, but rather she has supported lives. This Geneva native cannot explain her love for Africa; she simply lives it. In fact, she taught for two years in Burundi before joining Sentinelles.

In Geneva, she leads a simple and balanced life. In her daily life and in her tastes, she favours authenticity and shuns hypocrisy, falsehood and dishonesty.

When asked about her personality, she remains reserved: 'It's not for me to say what should be remembered.' Those who know her speak of her rigour, her unflinching commitment and also of her uncompromising nature.

During her 38 years of commitment, Christiane Badel has witnessed the evolution of Sentinelles. 'Evolution, evolution... more like continuity. The administrative work has evolved. The substance of the work itself has not changed. So many people have not



Photo © Yvan Muriset

had the chance to get what they need to take control of their lives.'

She draws this conviction from her experiences in the field. She talks about the children she met who were injured, sick or forgotten. 'Some families were living under just a simple piece of plastic. Each story is quite striking.'

Much of the daily administrative burden has been lifted. But not the essentials. 'You don't leave Sentinelles. You leave a job, but not the cause.' She now takes time for herself, which she devotes to country walks. Walking in the woods and forests and watching animals is her way of recharging her batteries. She belongs to a group of birdwatchers and will head off to the Jura without a second thought to spot chamois.

'I am grateful to Edmond and Sentinelles for giving me the chance to take part in all of this.'

And our thanks to her for helping rebuild so many lives.

L.M.

Sentinelles

To the rescue of wounded innocence

Rue du Bugnon 42, CH-1020
Renens/Lausanne VD Switzerland
Tél. +41 21 646 19 46

  [sentinellesfondation](https://www.facebook.com/sentinellesfondation)

info@sentinelles.org, www.sentinelles.org

Banque Cantonale Vaudoise, CH-1001 Lausanne

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