

# ONE VOICE

TOGETHER IN PRAYER FOR AN **END TO POVERTY**

## **INDONESIA TSUNAMI: AN UPDATE FROM OUR RESPONSE TEAM**

**A few days before Christmas, Indonesia was hit by a devastating tsunami caused by a volcanic eruption. Waves crashed through towns on the Sundra Strait between Java and Sumatra on the night of 22 December. There was no warning.**

437 people were killed, 14,000 injured and more than 33,000 people have lost or had to flee from their homes. Hospitals, hotels and shops were also destroyed.

Our local partner launched a response immediately, establishing the scale of the damage and how best to meet people's most urgent needs. Staff are prioritising clean drinking water and medical care, as well as the distribution of blankets, mattresses, cooking equipment and tarpaulins for shelter.

Tearfund's Disaster Management Lead for Asia, Sanjeev Bhanja, said 'Our local partner worked quickly, with good coordination, and was able to provide lifesaving emergency aid among communities affected in the Lampung district.'

Many communities in Indonesia were still reeling from the tsunami back in September, so this latest disaster is another set back for this country.

### **PRAYER FOCUS:**

- Pray for people who have been directly affected by the tsunami – those who have lost loved ones, for the injured, for those lacking clean water and shelter.
- Ask God to strengthen the emergency response teams including Tearfund's partners and other humanitarian workers.
- Pray for efforts to improve tsunami warning systems and that communities would be able to be better prepared for future disasters.

### **A NOTE FROM...**

It's heartbreaking to read of the devastation the tsunami caused, especially as this was so soon after the September tsunami. Jesus calls us to go wherever there is brokenness; we might not all be able to reach the people of Indonesia physically, but we can touch their lives with prayer.

**Serena Suen, Humanitarian Support Team**

## **DON'T LET ANYTHING HOLD YOU BACK**

*By Emily Owen, following a chat with some of Tearfund's amazing over-65s volunteers.*

What struck me most about Julie is what a deep thinker she is. When visiting an orphanage on a two-week trip to Zambia with Tearfund Go, she encouraged the children. 'I told them of my adoption as a baby and that I had been a nurse,' says Julie from Leicester. 'Sharing our personal testimonies with people can give them hope.'

I spoke with three Tearfund Go volunteers: Julie, Earl and Pauline. At first glance it looks like their common ground is all being over the age of 65. But, after they shared their experiences of travelling with Tearfund, I discovered that it's their courage and closeness to Jesus that unites this brilliant trio.

### **Recognise your skills, and God's strength**

Julie didn't know that she was a teacher until she was faced with a room full of people to teach in Zambia. She gave a lesson in how to care for others, listen well and resolve conflict. You may think that you don't have the skills to be a volunteer, but if you've ever led a Bible study, hosted a small group or been through a challenge in your life then you've got experience and wisdom to share.

Julie learnt that it doesn't matter how old you are, it's about your strengths. 'An older man was surprised to see me painting, and asked me my age,' she says. 'When he heard I was in my early 70s, his verdict was that I was strong.'

For Earl, from Lincolnshire, the challenges started before he even left the country. First, where to go? 'Cambodia seemed to stand out,' he says. But after some research, he changed his mind. 'I don't do heat, and 28-32°C put me off.' Yet, within a few days... 'God spoke to me through his word, saying not to worry about conditions. He will help me to cope in whatever circumstance,' he says.

Next, the cost. Recently retired and on a pension, Earl had every reason to be careful. But a timely sermon confirmed the decision to travel.

Did age ever factor into Earl's decision? 'Yes, my age did make me hesitate,' says Earl. 'But not my ability.' Earl's courage comes from his relationship with God: 'It is not what we can do, but what God can do through us,' he says.

### **And then go for it**

Speaking with Pauline from Eastbourne, her theology is clear. 'If the Lord puts it on your heart, you have to go for it', she told me. Her faith and willingness set her up to fly out to Colombia for a month with Tearfund.

Chatting with her, I realised that we often hold ourselves back. She quickly answered my question about whether her age affected her decision: 'While I've got the energy and strength, why wouldn't I?' she asked.

'There's a fulfilment in helping,' says Pauline, who took her English teaching skills into local schools and helped to lead women's ministry in the churches. And she's already wondering what's next. 'If you're healthy enough, if you've got it in your heart, then go for it!'

I hope you're as impressed, inspired and challenged by Julie, Earl and Pauline as I am. Maybe you're feeling led to explore Tearfund Go's volunteering opportunities yourself! Either way, let's pray.

*Father,*

*Help us to put our trust in your guidance and provision like Earl, to have courage and confidence in our abilities like Pauline, and to let our experiences be used for your glory like Julie.*

*Thank you that you invite us to partner in your work across the world. We pray that you'll open our eyes to the opportunities you want us to use for your glory.*

*Amen.*

**To find out more about more about Tearfund's exciting opportunities to volunteer overseas, visit [www.tearfund.org/go](http://www.tearfund.org/go)**

## **CORNERSTONES OF PEACE**

*'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.'* Psalm 118:22

**When Evelyn from South Sudan discovered she had contracted HIV she thought her life was over. However, she has learned that she – along with others living with the virus – have an important role to play in a nation riven by conflict.**

Evelyn Letio first discovered that she had HIV 25 years ago. She was living in Uganda, widowed with four children. She had been considering remarrying when she learned the news.

'I wanted to bring my dead husband out of the ground and cut him to pieces. I was so full of anger and bitterness that he had brought HIV into our lives. I thought of nothing but death and revenge.'

However, God had a rather more hopeful message for her, and, it turns out, a plan.

### **Two new beginnings**

After learning of her infection, Evelyn left Uganda to return to the nation of her birth, South Sudan. There, she planned to live out what she thought would be her last years, leaving her children in the care of relatives.

When she arrived, she found South Sudan wracked by poverty and years of war, which had left people with nothing. Meanwhile, her relatives had learned about her husband's death. Because of the stigma connected to HIV, they ostracised her, refusing to eat with her, touch her or even allow her near their homes. This only added to her bitterness. However, at her lowest ebb, God decided to speak to her.

'In the midst of my illness and despair, God told me: "My daughter, with or without HIV, you must live.'" The voice was so real that Evelyn says she looked under the bed to find its source. Eventually she went down on her knees and asked God to free her from the bitterness. She also asked for the courage to speak openly with everyone she met about having HIV.

As she got up again, Evelyn says she felt as if a weight had been lifted from her. And, just as she had asked God, she started talking about her HIV status.

### **Empowerment**

Evelyn, along with a handful of others, formed the South Sudan Network of People Living with HIV, where she worked for six years until 2013. However, as the network developed, Evelyn felt that it had become dominated by the men in it, with little attention paid to the needs or difficulties of the women and girls.

In response, Evelyn formed the National Empowerment of Positive Women United (NEPWU) in 2013, along with a group of 30 other women. By December 2017, membership had grown to 1,600 women and girls living with or affected by HIV, in 16 associations across South Sudan.

The group is dedicated to educating women with HIV on self-care and how they can access treatment. It also works to raise awareness about the rights of people living with HIV.

HIV is a serious problem in South Sudan, the world's youngest nation. Close to three per cent of the population are infected, and there are concerns that this number could grow considerably, if unchecked. Worse still, many clinics were forced to close due to the civil war in 2013 and the violence which still continues. Fewer than a tenth of women with HIV in South Sudan have access to the antiretroviral treatments they need to stay alive and in good health.

However, providing treatment is only a part of the work of NEPWU: 'If you don't have food, your medicine is useless,' Evelyn explains. 'Who can take such strong drugs on an empty stomach?'

### **Chased away**

Just as important as medical treatment and food is dealing with the anger and trauma that many of the women are suffering – just as Evelyn herself had faced. 'Through living with HIV, I have felt the resentment that comes with rejection and isolation,' she says. And it turns out she isn't alone. 'Many people living with HIV are chased away from their homes and abandoned by their families. Effectively, they're left to starve. Others fear losing their jobs. About a quarter of our members – around 400 – contracted HIV because they have been raped. Many of us are survivors of sexual violence.'

South Sudan's civil war and the culture of violence that surrounds it are partly responsible for this. Civil conflict persists in the nation, even though the war is officially over. While it is mostly men that are fighting, women and children suffer disproportionately through sexual and gender-based violence – so often used as a weapon of war around the world.

Finding healing for women's emotional scars lies at the heart of NEPWU's work. 'If someone comes to me broken, I listen,' she says. 'Without peace, life is so difficult.'

### **Positive peacemaking**

Evelyn has a wider vision of how these women can make peace, however. She believes that men and women living with HIV have a vital role in bringing reconciliation to a nation that is tragically divided.

She says that her eyes were opened to this when she joined Tearfund's Inspired Individuals programme. The scheme nurtures, trains and supports Christian leaders around the world who have an exciting and innovative vision.

'I used to think peacebuilding was just connected to politics. I realise now that so much of my work is about restoring peace in the community and this is essential to the bigger picture too' – part of NEPWU's work is to help HIV positive women become reconciled and reintegrated with their families and home communities.

'We are becoming an active part of the peace process in South Sudan. If we, who are extremely marginalised because of our HIV positive status, can find our place and voice, surely it will give hope to others that they too can achieve acceptance, worth and dignity. And also, they can be part of transforming our country, whatever their age, gender, status or difference.'

'We have been praying for peace in South Sudan for so long. The high-level peace process remains of utmost importance, but we need to make sure that negotiations also include the voices of youth, churches, women and vulnerable groups.'

### **At home with peace**

'But peace deals can only do so much. Sustainable peace isn't achieved when the ink hits the paper. Peace should be sought in everyday interactions between neighbours, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives – those who have been enemies, becoming friends.'

'To truly build strong foundations of peace, we must each individually decide to begin a personal journey of reconciliation in our own hearts and homes.' It is the same journey that Evelyn herself began, when she first heard the voice in the midst of her bitterness.

'Peace has to start at home,' she adds. This is key for Evelyn, because she knows that a peacemaker who hasn't reached out to try and make peace with both themselves and those closest to them, isn't fully ready for the job of healing their nation.

### **LET'S PRAY**

*Thank you that you are the God who draws close to the despairing and despised. You hear the cry of their hearts. And you entrust them some of your most precious and important work.*

*Embolden Evelyn and all those in NEPWU. May their voices be heard and respected as they challenge the taboo of HIV in South Sudan. And may they offer a powerful message to a nation crippled by conflict. Amen.*

## PRAYER POINTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

 Pray for the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) following the elections held on 30 December. The result was announced on Thursday, with one of the opposition leaders a surprise winner. This means the first electoral transfer of power in 59 years, and there are fears of violence. Please pray for peace and stability.

 Pray for Guatemala, whose government has just disposed of the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala. This was an independent body set up with the UN to investigate corruption. Pray for the truth to come to light, and for Guatemala to be free of corruption.

 Elections held in Bangladesh on 30 December have caused violent protests around the country amid accusations of vote rigging, with at least 17 people killed. Pray for peace, and that the re-elected Prime Minister and her government will lead with compassion and integrity.