

The Messenger

Medical Mission International

Health, Healing & Hope



MMI Delivers Hope in South Sudan

Blind child injured in war receives sight restoring eye surgery

Medical Mission International completed a third successful eye surgery campaign in an isolated and impoverished area north of Yida in South Sudan. Because of committed donor support, these medical services are available at no charge to poor and suffering people in remote geographic areas. More than 700 people were screened and received medical attention and doctors performed two hundred and forty-five eye surgeries during the week-long mission.

Tabitha, six years old, was the youngest beneficiary of sight restoring surgery and her plight captured the hearts of the entire medical team. Recently, Tabitha was blinded when a bomb detonated near her. South Sudan's on-going conflict continues to tear the country apart, maiming and killing innocent children. The medical team said the number of patients with eye trauma continues to grow. The injuries reflect the steady violence that started in 2013 with South Sudan's civil war.

"Tabitha is a remarkable child who has endured a complex trauma. We are thankful to MMI donors that allow us to reach hurting children like Tabitha," said Johan Claassen, MMI liaison in South Sudan. Tabitha was standing outside not far from her family's hut when what was likely a mortar exploded nearby. Both her eyes were blinded, and her left arm was blown off below her elbow. Although her right arm remains intact, it is no longer usable.

One of the team physicians, Dr. Pons, examined Tabitha on the first day of the outreach. Shrapnel



and blast particles had damaged her eyes and she had also developed traumatic cataracts. During surgery, Dr. Pons removed the dust, sand and foreign objects that were lodged in her eyes, and he successfully removed one cataract.

"Tabitha is gradually improving. She can differentiate between colors, and she takes notice and looks when people are doing activities near her like pouring water," Claassen said. A few days after Tabitha's surgery, Claassen sat about three metres away and waved to Tabitha. When she responded to him by lifting her partially amputated arm, her mother cried from joy.

Since the surgery, Tabitha is less afraid, calmer and no longer screams when she's not directly near her mother. After surgery, the medical team was able to approach Tabitha with greater ease, and Tabitha began to try to open her eyes without prompting.

Website: mminternational.org.uk

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“It feels like a miracle that we were able to help her. Not being completely blind is an enormous gain for her and all the others here suffering from treatable blindness,” said Claassen.

Like Tabitha, many patients arrived at the prearranged location several weeks in advance. People slept on the ground outside, desperate to receive help from the medical team on arrival. Claassen said the patients came from “far and wide,” the blind being led by others as they walked. Many patients reported “footing” for more than a week to reach the team’s location. In addition to the sight restoring eye surgeries, the team provided care to numerous children with serious eye conditions, infections, and other bacterial conditions.

Two sisters, both widows journeyed together for five days so that blind sibling, Zainab, could receive eye surgery. The day after surgery, the sister’s shared a joyful moment sitting and smiling together. Zainab clutched her sister’s arm and happily reported that she was no longer blind, and she could see that the head wrap she was wearing was the color of the sun. Zainab said she was overjoyed to see her sister’s face once again after being completely blind from cataracts for more than five years.



“What a contrast before and after these surgeries,” said Claassen. *“Patients like Zainab walked slowly with her head down and had to be guided. Zainab and hundreds of other suffering people received sight restoring surgeries, joy, and hope, and children like Tabitha do not have to remain in darkness.”* +