



FIONA's NEWS
December 2023



“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned” Isaiah 9v2
““Sir,’ they said, ‘we would like to see Jesus.’” John 12v21b

At this time of year, we remember the shepherds who decided to go into Bethlehem to see the baby of whom the angels had spoken. The wise men followed the light of a star until they, too, “saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him”.



Poor sight and blindness are widespread in South Sudan. About half the population were deemed, in 2021, to be at risk of trachoma. This is caused by a bacterial infection which spreads easily where people are living with poor sanitation and/or in overcrowded dwellings. It can be prevented with good hygiene and is easily treated with antibiotics (where available) but untreated the eyelids turn under and cause scarring to the cornea and, eventually, blindness.

The Carter Centre have been supporting efforts to eliminate trachoma in various countries for several years, including eye camps in South Sudan. They have recently increased their efforts here, launching their “Peace in Sight” campaign last month. Their premise is that “By prioritizing access to eye care, we not only address a pressing health concern but also empower communities to lead the way in building peace.”



MAF frequently flies their staff with one of their most recent charters being for a surgical eye camp at Bor. In little over a week, they screened



over 3,000 people for different eye problems and operated on 859 people (1,050 eyes). Roughly half the operations were for trachoma and half for cataracts, with a markedly higher incidence of the former amongst the female patients.

You may like to watch these two videos. The first deals specifically with trachoma: <https://youtu.be/B4XgosZmfls>
The second, which also features MAF, covers the visit earlier this year of senior staff from the Carter Centre to see the work being done to eliminate both trachoma and guinea worm:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6FrOruo56s0>

(Photos: Jenny Davies)

Whilst the light of a star was sufficient to guide the magi to their destination, solar electricity is a better source of light for indoor activities. Last month, MAF ferried solar panels out to Kapoeta, for the roof of a new church. Phil, from our facilities team, joined the flight in order to help Swedish missionary Filip with the installation. The solar panels are powering the lights in the main area where the congregation are already gathering for worship. (Photos: Filip Lidstrom)



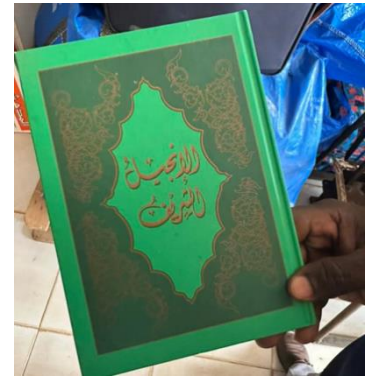


I have written in a number of my letters of the peace and reconciliation workshops that MAF has facilitated. The material was originally developed with Rwandan Christians in the wake of the genocide and now forms a workshop called “Healing Hearts, Transforming Nations” – see the promotional video: <https://youtu.be/jbGpXLGyxjA>

As the workshops have proved so effective in South Sudan, more churches and mission organisations have become involved and MAF has started training other facilitators to deliver the course. The most recent workshop (*photo from MAF facebook*) was held in Juba, led by two new facilitators but with logistics support from one of our staff.

The material has a Christian foundation with a focus on the cross as the place to take away hurt and to gain the grace to forgive and so build reconciliation. Participants, however, need not be Christian so in South Sudan sometimes a few of those taking part may be Muslims. It was very special to receive an update on the impact one of the workshops. We heard that a Muslim attendee, an imam, has since become a Christian having seen and understood God’s love through the gift of his Son.

AIM is part of a network encouraging mission activity in Juba and other parts of South Sudan. The ongoing civil war in Sudan has led to thousands of people from Darfur arriving in Juba, where pastors who are originally from Darfur are keen to share with them a message of hope through the gospel. MAF has just flown 1,500 Bibles from Yei to Juba, free of charge, to support this outreach to introduce people to Jesus. As AIM’s Jordan Scotland explains: “This is an opportunity to reinforce what the Darfurian congregation is already doing in Juba. They are already reaching out it is just that they didn’t have any Bibles in Classical Arabic.” (*Photo: Jenny Davies*)



To my surprise, I have just had 3 weeks back in Papua New Guinea, assisting the programme to catch up after their later transition to the new software and to prepare for the interim audit. It was a joy to see friends at church and in MAF and to find that the Wednesday lunchtime ladies’ meeting is continuing strongly. I expect to return for a further 3 weeks in February to help with year end accounts preparation ready for the final audit and should be able to have a couple of days in Cairns afterwards.

MAF International is facing severe budgetary constraints in 2024. Your financial support for me in MAF is, therefore, especially appreciated, whilst I remain particularly thankful for your prayers and loving encouragement. I pray you will have a joy-filled Christmas as you celebrate the birth of the Christ child, light of the world and prince of peace and that God will richly bless you in 2024.

- Pray for those suffering from trachoma and other causes of blindness and for the surgeons and others involved in restoring sight and working to eliminate trachoma.
- Thank God for the impact of the peace and reconciliation workshops and for those coming to know Jesus through the Arabic Bibles and the ministry of Darfurian pastors.
- Please pray for a peaceful Christmas in South Sudan. Levels of criminal activity rise in December and tensions can increase with a higher security presence.
- Thank God that my knees have recovered from their battering when I had to run to make a tight flight connection. Please continue to pray for my physical, mental and spiritual health

Please let me or MAF know if you no longer want to receive this prayer letter or would like it in a different format (post or email) and let us know if you would also like to receive the briefer prayer letter without pictures that I send in the interim months.

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