

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to be here with you to celebrate our Charity's ninth annual Tag Rugby Tournament.

This year I am extremely pleased to thank all of you for your continuing support throughout the years without fail, in spite of the ongoing crisis which imposed very tough measures on all of us.

Activities

This past year's activities have been mostly focussed on Zimbabwe, which continues to be our most urgent and complex project.

We are now treating about 1600 patients affected by AIDS. The problems that the Zimbabwe people have to face are so staggering that often they cannot reach our Centres where free treatment is available.

Situation of the country

The period between March and October 2008 will be remembered as one during which the most efficient repression in thirty years against opposition members was performed by the Government, that used all possible ways to crush them: abductions, killings, systematic torture, and rape used as a means of political repression.

Only in February 2009, after months of discussions and under heavy pressure from South Africa, a power sharing agreement was accepted and put in place. It is too early to say if the President will really accept to share his powers or not. For the time being the situation of lawlessness remains unchanged.

In recent times the situation in Zimbabwe received unusual attention from the international press, because the cholera epidemic was "breaking news", and all people were eager to be informed about its evolution, death toll etc. Cholera is simply the result of many years of total neglect of basic public services which should be provided by the State to its citizens: clean water, maintenance of the sewerage system, waste collection, health care system in decent order, food and medicines. All these things, so far, are unavailable.

The people of Zimbabwe are hungry. In fact, they are starving. Over 6m people depend on international aid for basic food. Other emergencies are the extreme poverty of the vast majority of people, the bleak security situation and the blackouts, which often last for days.

We cannot afford to think that Zimbabwe is past hope. The people of Zimbabwe really believe that things can change and we all have a responsibility to do whatever is in our power to see that they are not holding onto false hope.

Against this background of humanitarian emergency, we were able to continue giving our patients and staff the medical care they need. We provided them with food, and we made sure that supply of imported fuel was available, to give power to all our projects. In February we finalized a solarisation project at the main Hospital in Mutoko, where now the staff houses are lit by solar power, and water is pumped from a new borehole by a solar pump. It took almost 18 months and some €250k, but changing the day-to-day lives of so many people was really great!

In this situation we have to be thankful to our donors for their trust in our Charity. They allow us to continue in our task by giving us the means to do so. We are facing a difficult year, because donors are not as ready to give as in the past. I thank you for your generosity. The need is overwhelming and, since we have no overheads, all of your kind donations go straight to the people who really need help. And we have 1,600 good reasons to ask for your help!

Thank you very much indeed!

Sebastiano