

Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital



Newsletter | December 2009



Dr Catherine Hamlin, Right Livelihood Award Laureate

The Fund congratulates Dr Hamlin on receiving The Right Livelihood Award (the Alternate Nobel Prize) "for her fifty years dedicated to treating obstetric fistula patients, thereby restoring the health, hope and dignity of thousands of Africa's poorest women".

Dr Hamlin, who is the first Australian woman to receive this prestigious international award, will travel to Stockholm in December to receive the award in the Swedish Parliament. For further details see www.rightlivelihood.org

Meaza Aweke spends much of her day in physiotherapy to regain her strength before her fistula can be repaired.

She says she is 20 years old. She has never been to school.

She first became pregnant after being married for two years. She was in obstructed labour for three days. Then her father took her to the nearest health care centre. She was told to go to another health centre. By the time she reached the fourth health post nothing could be done to save her baby. Meaza says "I knew when I lost the baby in my womb. I was so sick, not even noticing what was happening around me ... they pulled out the still born child."

Meaza developed obstetric fistula and foot drop caused by nerve damage during her long labour.

The last health post Meaza visited referred her to the Hamlin Fistula Centre

in Bahir Dar where she spent more than two months recovering from her ordeal. Then three months ago, when she was well enough, she was brought to the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital.

Meaza says, "Thanks to God, now I can take a walk, I can take a shower on my own and I can do whatever I want by myself. Before this, I had to be cuddled for a very long time and my father and mother took turns to clean me and give me showers. They carried me on their hands and put me in the wheelchair and they transported me from health centre to health centre looking for help to restore my health."

Now Meaza is the one who encourages other women at the Hospital to keep up their exercises by saying "Exercise is good. Look at me! From having to use a wheelchair I now only need one stick. Have faith that you will be cured."



DR HAMLIN'S LETTER

My Dear Friends in Australia

I have just returned home to Addis Ababa after a busy and very enjoyable month away visiting family, supporters and friends in Australia and New Zealand.

This was a special visit as my son Richard, travelled with me. My heart was so touched by the large number of people who came to the events that were organised, who sent me such kind messages of support and encouragement and by the many others who I know have a deep love for our work and who support us so faithfully and generously in so many ways. My travels gave me great encouragement and strengthened my hope that our work will continue well into the future until at last the awful blight of obstetric fistula is finally eradicated from the lives of the beautiful women of Ethiopia and throughout the developing world.

Lighting a candle

This past year we have been remembering and giving thanks to God for the work which Reg and I commenced 50 years ago when, with our six year old son, we first set foot in Ethiopia. The poverty and suffering of the women we saw broke our hearts and led us to stay to try and help them. In Reg's words we stayed to "light a candle for Africa".

Over this past year many people have said to me what a remarkable thing it is that I have been doing this work in Ethiopia for so long. In one sense 50 years is a long time, but apart from the fact that I believe Reg and I were led by God to come to Ethiopia to do this work, I don't think that what we have done is particularly remarkable at all. For with each passing year there have been more and more women in developing countries who have experienced the agony of prolonged obstructed labour; who have experienced the grief of delivering a still born child; and who have experienced the horror of incontinence and rejection for the rest of their lives.



Dr Hamlin with her son Richard

Instead of child birth bringing joy into the lives of these women it is a source of suffering and despair. Shut away and spread across many countries they are victims of 'a hidden pandemic'. The plight of the women, like young Meaza Aweke, who come to the Hospital in Addis Ababa and its regional centres continues to be as severe and heart wrenching today as the plight of the first women we saw half a century ago. For this reason we continue to love and care for them, to alleviate their suffering, and to cure them of their physical and psychological injuries.

So my years here seem like nothing by comparison.

In recent years the world has started to wake up to the awful plight of the millions of women who suffer from obstetric fistula. Increasing public awareness in the developed world has led to growing support for our work. A special premiere of the new documentary, *Lighting a Candle*, which the Australian Fund is producing with the generous assistance of AusAID, was held in Canberra during my visit. It will be released next year and I am sure that it will increase public awareness of the plight of these women and the Hospital's work of treatment, education and prevention within the broader context of improving maternal health in the developing world.

Despite our best efforts to treat these poor women, we know that the obstetric fistula pandemic will go on whilst ever women in labour are without access to trained medical help and proper medical facilities. The tragedy of these women is that their suffering is totally preventable.

A midwife for every woman

'A midwife for every woman', is the vision of our new Midwifery College and the twenty enthusiastic new students who started a few weeks ago are settling in well. They are our third intake and they come from five different areas of Ethiopia. Four of the students come from outside Metu where our fifth fistula outreach centre will be completed next year. Another two students are from the Afar Region. Many of you may know of the nomadic Afar people whose region in northern Ethiopia is very under developed. Valerie Browning is building a maternity hospital in the Afar and the two Afar students will work at that hospital after they graduate as midwives in three year's time.

The new midwifery college buildings which have been paid for with money donated by Australia are now providing



Students receive training at the Midwifery College

very suitable accommodation and teaching facilities for our students.

The third year students are very excited that they are nearing the end of their course and will spend the coming year focusing on research and fine tuning their skills in basic emergency obstetric care. They will travel back to their home areas for a large block of clinical placement and to carry out a community profile of their local areas in preparation for their first placement next year as fully trained midwives.

I look forward in great anticipation to the day when our first midwives are deployed out into the countryside to help their Ethiopian 'sisters'!

Annette Bennett and her team are doing a wonderful job in training and mentoring the students and preparing them in the best way possible for their work as rural midwives. We are very pleased to have four new Midwifery Tutors - Negede and Azeb who are, of course, Ethiopians, as well as Jacqueline Bernhard from Switzerland and Rosey King from Ballarat Australia.

Training rural midwives is the way of the future and my hope and fervent prayer is that other organisations will follow our example so that proper health care services are much more accessible to poor rural women.

Gratitude and heartfelt thanks

Despite the Global Financial Crisis and the downturn in economic conditions during the past year many Australians have continued to be very generous in their support for the Hospital's work and for this I am very grateful and express my heartfelt thanks and appreciation. The continued support for our Hamlin Fistula® Relief and Aid Fund in Australia through financial donations and the many in-kind contributions of multi-coloured shawls, underwear, dress materials, hospital beds and other equipment as well as other items has been most encouraging and a wonderful endorsement of what we are

doing to help these destitute outcast women.

Lighting a candle for them is as important today as it was for the women back in 1959. Without the assistance of our supporters both in Australia and elsewhere overseas the Hospital can do nothing to help them. Therefore, I want to thank you all from the bottom of my heart for your love and support and I wish you all a joyous and blessed Christmas as once again we celebrate the birth of our dear Saviour.

With my love,

Dr E. Catherine Hamlin AC

JUBILEE THANKSGIVING SERVICE FOR DR CATHERINE HAMLIN AC

A highlight of Dr Hamlin's visit to Australia was the Jubilee Thanksgiving Service held at St Thomas' Anglican Church, North Sydney on Saturday 24th October. The service was attended by over 350 people.

The Fund thanks Ret. Archbishop Harry Goodhew AO and the Rev Stuart Abahams AM for their wise and inspirational words during the service as well as for putting together such a memorable service of thanks to God for the work of Dr Catherine Hamlin AC and her late husband, Dr Reg Hamlin OBE, over the past 50 years.

Dr Hamlin and her son Richard both addressed the congregation with their heartfelt reflections of life in Ethiopia over the past fifty years and they spoke passionately and lovingly of their Christian faith and their hope for expanding the treatment and preventative work of the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital in the future.



Dr Hamlin with Ret. Archbishop Goodhew

HAMLIN FISTULA® RELIEF AND AID FUND

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Shelley Hayton, well known Contralto and former member of the Australian Opera, sang her beautiful song dedicated to Dr Hamlin, *Be My Hands, Be My Heart, Be My Eyes*. Members of the St James' Turrumurra Anglican Church Choir very effectively led the congregational singing of a number of well known hymns played on the organ, piano and trumpet by Ridley and Florence Smith and Brian Evans.

The members of the Fund's board led the congregation in prayers for the leaders and people of Ethiopia, the Hospital and its staff, the women who come to the Hospital for help and the generous people who support the work of the Hospital.

The Fund expresses its thanks and appreciation to all who made the service such a memorable occasion and to the Rector and staff of St Thomas' Anglican Church for their assistance in providing the use of the Church and its facilities.

The Fund also thanks all who attended the service, in particular those who travelled long distances from interstate and rural New South Wales.

DOCUMENTARY PREMIERE OF LIGHTING A CANDLE

Over the past year the Fund and the Hospital have been working with a film crew and AusAID on a new documentary called *Lighting a Candle*. The film illuminates Dr Hamlin's enduring passion and commitment to bring an end to obstetric fistula in Ethiopia and other developing countries. It also documents for the first time ever a number of aspects of the Hospital's work, including: the long term beneficial effects for the women who are cured of obstetric fistula; the Hamlin College of Midwives; Desta Mender and the Hospital's outreach program.

The premiere screening was held at the National Film and Sound Archive in Canberra on Wednesday 21 October with Dr Catherine Hamlin as the guest of honour. The film has been funded by AusAID. Mr Peter Baxter, Acting Director General of AusAID, addressed the audience and confirmed the Australian Government's ongoing commitment to the work of the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital.

Notice

The Fund has been advised by a number of its supporters that they have received letters from another organisation soliciting financial support for obstetric fistula related work in Ethiopia.

Hamlin Fistula® Relief and Aid Fund is the only authorised representative in Australia of the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital. The Fund also wishes to assure its supporters that it has not in the past nor will it in the future disclose the names or addresses of its supporters to any other fundraising organisation.

The Fund is pleased to be able to once again confirm that every cent of every dollar donated to the Hamlin Fistula® Relief and Aid Fund is available to support the work of Dr Catherine Hamlin AC and the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital in Ethiopia.

The film has been made by some of the same production crew which made the very successful short documentary *A Compassionate Vision* and so once again our thanks go to Steven Salgo (Director/Producer), Dina Volaric (Producer), Sue Lumsdon and the other members of the crew for the time and commitment that they have given to this challenging project. The Fund is planning for the documentary to be broadcast nationally during 2010 and for it to be made available to individual supporters and groups. Further details will be advised next year.



Dr Hamlin with Richard and other family members at the film premiere

The Fund's office will be closed during the holiday season between Wednesday 23 December 2009 and Wednesday 27 January 2010.

Christmas Greetings

The Board and staff of the Fund thank all those who have supported the Fund and the work of the Hospital in so many ways during the year and we wish you all a very joyous Christmas and New Year.

Here are some ideas as to how you might like to support the Hospital as part of your preparations for Christmas.

A 'friendship gift'

If you would like to make a donation to the work of the Hospital as a Christmas gift for a family member or friend, then complete the attached donation slip and we will include with your tax deductible receipt a greeting card which you can give to your family member or friend.



2010 Calendar - \$20

(including postage and GST)

Tea Towel - \$20

(including postage and GST)

Light a Candle this Christmas - \$15

(including postage and GST)

Key ring - \$10

(including postage and GST)

To order or donate visit

www.fistulatrust.org or complete the form on the reverse side of this slip and return it to the Fund or contact the office on (02) 9449 6725.

Orders must be received by Tuesday 15th December to ensure dispatch in time for Christmas.

Please accept the attached donation for the work of the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital through the

HAMLIN FISTULA® RELIEF & AID FUND

Please post to PO Box 965 Wahroonga NSW 2076

Donations of over \$2 are allowable Income Tax Deductions.

DGR 900484487 (Please print clearly)

Title Mr Mrs Miss Ms Dr Rev
(please circle)

Name _____

Address _____

P/CODE _____

Phone _____

Gift or Cheque Attached \$ _____

Please send a greeting card with my receipt

Allocate for Hamlin Fistula Int'l Foundation

Send to me suitable wording for a Bequest

Send to me a free DVD and brochures to interest others

I would like to order:

2010 Calendar - \$20.00 (inc GST + postage)

Tea Towel - \$20.00 (inc GST + postage)

Candle - \$15.00 (inc GST + postage)

Key Ring - \$10.00 (inc GST + postage)

OR Please debit the sum of \$ _____ to my

MasterCard

Visa

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CCV*

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*three digit security code on the signature strip of your credit card

Name on card _____

Expiry Date _____

Signature _____