

Rotary volunteers lead international medical team to Kenya

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Multi-specialty initiative provides preventive care to children in Nairobi slums still recovering from post-election violence

NAIROBI, Kenya (Sept. 22, 2008) -- About 70 volunteers from 11 countries arrived in Kenya last week to provide preventive health care services to thousands of children in the poorest neighborhoods of Nairobi, a city still recovering from the post-election violence of December and January.

The international team includes health care professionals and non-medical volunteers from Australia, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, India, Japan, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, United Kingdom and the United States. They include physicians, dentists, dental assistants, paramedics, registered nurses, optometrists and opticians. About two thirds of the volunteers are members of Rotary clubs.

The medical mission, which runs Sept. 22 -30, will focus on the health needs of children living in the Nairobi slums of Mukuru, Mathare and Korogocho, where the poverty rate is high and access to preventive health care extremely limited.

According to UNICEF, the widespread rioting and violence that rocked Kenya in the wake of the disputed Dec. 27 presidential election "took a particularly high toll" on the residents of Nairobi's slums, where almost 60 percent of the city's population eke out an existence on personal incomes averaging less than \$1 a day. As usual in such circumstances, children were among the most vulnerable victims.

According to team co-leader Connie Spark, an optician and Rotary club member from York, Pa., each child will be screened to prioritize his or her most pressing needs -- dental work, vision problems, malnutrition, injuries, infection, etc. -- then sent to the appropriate specialty stations. Spark says the team is prepared to see as many as 3,000 patients a day, and the total value of services and supplies to be delivered is estimated at \$1 million.

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Local physicians and other Kenyan health care professionals will participate to ensure that patients will continue to receive appropriate care after the mission concludes. All unused supplies also will remain in Nairobi for that purpose.

The international team will be hosted by Kenyan Rotary club members, many of them members of Rotarians for Fighting

AIDS (RFFA), an international organization for Rotary members concerned about the HIV/AIDS pandemic. RFFA has been especially active in Kenya, where it will function as the “mobilization partner” for the medical mission, handling logistics such as transportation, housing, food and security. In all, about 125 Kenyans will participate, including Rotary-affiliated volunteers and health care professionals.

In cooperation with RFFA, the international charity Hope Worldwide will offer HIV testing and counseling during the medical mission, according to RFFA founder and chair Marion Bunch, a Rotary club member from Dunwoody, Ga.

The medical mission is supported by a \$38,000 matching grant from the Rotary Foundation. Also contributing funds are Rotary clubs in Pennsylvania, Georgia and Kenya and the Coca-Cola Africa Foundation.

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Rotary is an organization of business and professional leaders united worldwide to provide humanitarian service and help to build goodwill and peace in the world. It is comprised of 1.2 million members working in over 32,000 clubs in more than 200 countries and geographical areas. Rotary members initiate community projects that address many of today’s most critical issues, such as violence, AIDS, hunger, the environment and health care.

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