

UK charity installs world's first operating room for children in a refugee camp

The first child patient has undergone surgical procedures in a brand new dedicated operating room within the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya.

In a world first, UK charity Kids Operating Room (KidsOR) has shipped and delivered more than 3000 components to create a specialised operating room within the Kakuma General Hospital.

As the world's largest and most established refugee camp, with a child population of 40,000, the dedicated operating room is expected to care for up to 1,000 children every year.

The operating room, funded by the Biltema Foundation and led by Kenyan Paediatric surgeon, Neema Kaseje, will deliver surgeries as well as scale the paediatric surgical care in Kakuma through the training of junior doctors.



Dr Neema Kaseje, Paediatric surgeon, KidsOR advisory member and WEF Young Global Leader said: “There is a huge and desperate need for a paediatric surgery facility at this camp, and in many more camps around the world. I am proud that KidsOR have pledged to get children in Kakuma access to the safe surgery they so badly need.”

The first surgeries undertaken within the newly installed Operating Room were on six-year-old and 10-year-old boys, both of whom were suffering from inguinal hernias.

Performed by Dr Neema Kaseye and her surgical team, the repair to the hernia took 40 minutes, which, if left untreated would have continued to cause both boys severe stomach pain and digestion issues.

The surgery was previously unavailable in Kakuma as the hospital did not have the necessary operating facilities or paediatric surgeons to perform the procedure.

Dr Neema Kaseje added: “Africa is a focus because Africa hosts

more than 26 percent of the world's refugee population. Usually in these settings you would find there isn't any equipment for children or infrastructure that is adapted to children, therefore providing surgical services for children in these settings is very difficult.

"It's great that KidsOR has taken the lead in this area and this could actually serve as a model for other humanitarian contexts beyond Africa."

Shipped from its Dundee hub in December 2020, the instalment comes after multiple delays and supply chain interruptions caused by the pandemic and the infamous traffic jam at the Suez Canal.

Garreth Wood, Co-founder of KidsOR, said: "This operating room will save and transform the lives of children and their families in desperate and uncertain circumstances.

"I'm proud of the efforts of our teams, in the UK and Africa for pulling together and making this incredible feat a reality – and I'm delighted that Neema is able to start work so quickly to meet the surgical needs of children within the camp."

Founded in 1992, Kakuma is the largest refugee camp in the world with a city-sized population roughly the size of Dundee or Oxford.

Originally set up for people who were forced to flee conflict in Sudan, Kakuma is now home to 188,000 people from 22 nationalities including South Sudan, Somali, DR Congo and Ethiopia.

The limited to no access of appropriate surgical care puts the lives of children at risk of dying from treatable conditions like appendicitis or subject to a lifetime of disability from a broken ankle.

With the lack of resources being even worse for people forced to flee their homes, a call was made in 2020 by the Senior Advisor to the United Nations Agency for Refugees, Prince Jamie de Bourbon de Parme, to provide provisions for children's surgery.

Prince Jamie de Bourbon de Parme, Senior Advisor to the United Nations Agency for Refugees said: "This is a landmark moment for children in refugee settings. I am proud that UNHCR, IRC and Kids Operating Room have come together to give children in Kakuma access to life-saving surgery.

"The life prospects of children who require surgery, and their families, are greatly enhanced by the opening of this facility. KidsOR has taken the lead in this area and I hope that we can continue to partner so that this serves as a model for other humanitarian contexts beyond Africa."

KidsOR plans to transform paediatric surgery in Kenya, the Kakuma project will set the groundwork to build capacity for nine additional children's operating rooms in the coming years.

By 2030, KidsOR aims to have installed 120 dedicated children's operating rooms across Africa, providing essential surgery to over 635,000 children and saving thousands of lives.

For more information on KidsOR, please visit: www.KidsOR.org

