

Edinburgh Charity officially opens children's operating room in refugee camp

Official opening of first children's operating room in a refugee camp ceremony to celebrate work of paediatric surgeons making a huge impact

The long-awaited opening ceremony of the first dedicated paediatric operating room within a refugee camp setting took place on Friday.

Located in Kakuma, Kenya – the world's largest refugee camp – the installation is the work of UK charity Kids Operating Room [KidsOR](#) which delivered and installed more than 3000 items of equipment and surgical tools to provide safe surgery in one of the world's most challenging settings.

Plans for the ceremony at Kakuma General Hospital were put on hold since the Operating Room was established in June 2020 due to pandemic restrictions and repeated local terrorist warnings.

While it has been in use for close to a year, it is anticipated that the Operating Room will provide capacity for operations on up to 1,000 children every year, providing life-saving treatments that were previously unavailable in Kakuma due to the lack of necessary surgical equipment and paediatric surgeons.

The anticipated ceremony will be a welcome celebration of the surgical theatre's impact in the camp – which has a child population exceeding 40,000 – and will finally see KidsOR representatives join surgical teams, key figures from UNHCR and IRC, and county officials of Kenya to 'cut the ribbon' and officially open the Operating Room.

Dr Neema Kaseje, Paediatric surgeon, KidsOR advisory member and WEF Young Global Leader has been training a surgical team in Kenya to maximise use of the OR, while leading the procedures that have taken place to date.

She said: "It's hard for most of us to imagine living in a refugee camp setting, let alone the thought of our child not being able to access the surgery that could save their life or alleviate them from terrible pain.

"I am looking forward to finally commemorating the opening of this crucial facility and I am honoured to be able to play a part in these life-changing operations and the social and economic benefits the installation has brought to the area."

KidsOR research identified that 1.75 billion children – around 9 in every 11 children globally – don't have access to safe surgical care should they need it and each year 54 million additional children need surgical procedures that are not available.

10-year-old Jibril Hussein Imidi was one of the first patients to receive surgery from Dr Neema and her surgical team, having suffered from a debilitating and painful hernia since birth. Jibril's condition was left untreated due to the lack of specialist surgeons and facilities that were adapted to children, causing him severe stomach pain and digestion issues.

After the 40-minute removal surgery finally took place, Jibril's mother, Aziza said: "We had so many challenges before he was operated on. We could not go a week without him falling

sick. The hospital became our home; we spent less time at home and more time at the hospital.

“The operating room provided Jibril with the operation that he so desperately needed. The surgery has helped so much. He is now back at school and doing so well.”

Launched by husband-and-wife philanthropists Garreth and Nicola Wood, KidsOR’s Operating Room installations enabled 49,154 operations in 2021, an increase of 65% and up from 29,780 the previous year, while 66% of operations were elective compared to 34% emergency procedures.

The estimated economic benefit to African and South American countries where KidsOR has completed installations increased by almost £0.5 billion in the same period, up from \$1.07 billion to \$1.52 billion.

Garreth Wood, Co-founder of KidsOR, said “The new safe surgical facilities, equipment and trained medical staff in Kakuma have already had a substantial effect and we are looking forward to finally recognising this achievement.

“Thousands of children can now access timely surgical care in Kakuma Refugee camp – which has a bigger population than Dundee – and this is something that should be celebrated.

“It will be rewarding for many of those involved in this milestone project to officially mark the occasion, especially after the long delays and understandable postponements of the event over the last year. This is only the start and we will strive to continue progressing this vital requirement not only throughout Africa but other developing countries.”

Garreth, as well as KidsOR Africa Director Rosemary Mugwe, will be attending the official opening in Kakuma, as well as Dr Neema Kaseje.

KidsOR is a charity tackling the global crisis in children’s

surgery. You can donate to their lifesaving work by visiting www.kidsor.org.

