

Saving the world by saving a child

By Jannell Ford

Today more 130 Nepalese children – victims of a bitter civil war – have a reason to believe in the future.

A mountainous country, nestled between China and India, it has been torn apart for the last ten years by fighting between insurgent Maoists and the Nepalese military.

But one of the greatest tragedies is the fate of many Nepalese children who have seen their families and friends killed, been abandoned and suffered abuse at the hands of child traffickers.

The plight of these innocent victims was brought to the attention of the ISIS Foundation of Bermuda two years ago and after reading and hearing heart-wrenching stories of child abuse and neglect, the charity decided to extend a helping hand.

It was the start of a long two years to win custody of dozens of traumatised children, to give them a new life.

The mission of the ISIS Foundation is to make a positive difference in the lives of children in the developing world. ISIS Limited and the ISIS Foundation were formed in early 1997.

Continued on Page 4

SATURDAY
Spotlight



Nepalese children wave from the window of ISIS foster home, the Dhapasi Home.

ISIS foundation: Saving the world one child at a time

Continued from Page 1

Audette Exel and Sharon A. Beesley are best friends and founders of the foundation.

They began work on the ISIS Foundation in late 1997, and funded it fully themselves until the end of 1998. At the same time, they established a corporate finance and consultancy business, ISIS Limited, so that the business could pay the ongoing administration and general management costs of the ISIS Foundation.

Leonie Exel, General Manager of ISIS and Audette Exel's sister, said: "A volunteer working in Nepal brought to our attention that there were children living in dreadful homes in Kathmandu.

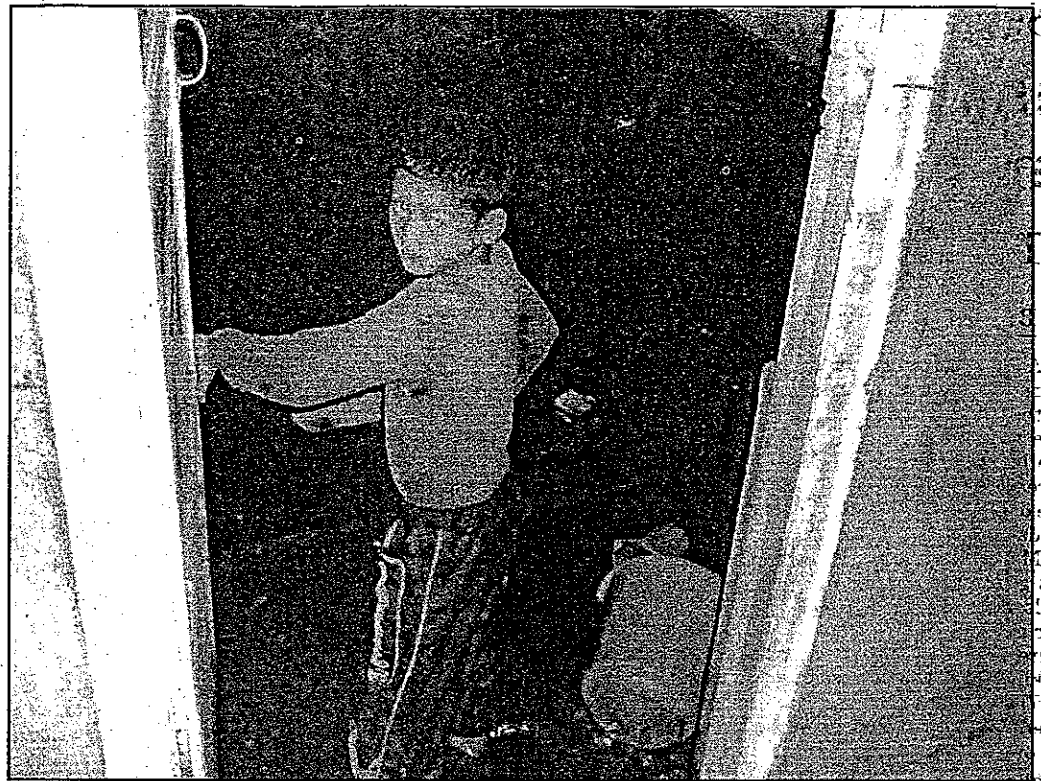
"They were underfed and sickly, and begging on the buses and streets for food and money."

ISIS immediately set to work to get the children released from the homes, but the charity soon became embroiled in lengthy and difficult negotiations with child traffickers. "When the children fled from the mountains of Nepal, they ended up under the control of a child trafficker in Kathmandu," Ms Exel explained. "They were living in overcrowded, dilapidated, depressing homes."

ISIS spent two years negotiating and working with police and government agencies in Nepal and finally won custody of the traumatised children.

Ms Exel said: "It was a very difficult and emotionally draining situation. The child trafficker was clearly abusing the children.

"But we still had to negotiate and play hardball



A young child stands in water polluted with faeces after the "Thapasi" (toilet) overflows.

in order to win their freedom."

Ms Exel is reflective when she remembers the condition the kids were in when ISIS first took custody of them.

"In the two years we spent negotiating for their release, these children had been beaten, some had been sexually abused, many were unwell and malnourished and most had become accustomed to living unsupervised in filthy homes," she said. "One of the last homes they lived in had 64 children under one roof - they were a sea of unhappy kids, without proper care or love."

The charity currently rents nine foster homes for the children, aged between four and 17.

Ms Exel explained: "We managed to set up nine ISIS children's homes in Kathmandu.

"Our objective is to provide quality ongoing care for these children, so that they can live healthy, happy full lives."

Another Bermudian, Kim Carter, travelled to Kathmandu and experienced first hand the dreadful circumstances under which the children lived.

He said: "The children were living in horrible, dirty homes. The roofs leaked and the children would get wet when it rained.



Kim Carter celebrates with a group of Nepalese children. The children - now living in one of the ISIS foster homes - had just finished playing a game of soccer

"The children would wade ankle deep in filthy, disgusting water. Their eyes were always sad."

Mr. Carter was so moved by the experience that he established a charity, "The Kathmandu Kids Club" to raise money for the ISIS Foundation.

Continued on Page 5

Surendra's story

In early 2005, the ISIS Foundation found Surendra, his brother, and 54 other children in a home that was barely providing them enough food to eat.

They were not going to school, malnourished, covered in scabies and lice, and many were being sent out to beg for money on the streets. All of the children were uncared for.

ISIS general manager, Leonie Exel, said: "Surendra was skeletal, coughing and bent over in pain. ISIS immediately took him to the hospital where he was diagnosed as having severe septicaemia, pneumonia, and bacterial infections."

"He was put on oxygen and a drip. The hospital was draining a litre of fluid from his body every two days. He could not eat and was wasting rapidly. He had daily fevers of 104 degrees."

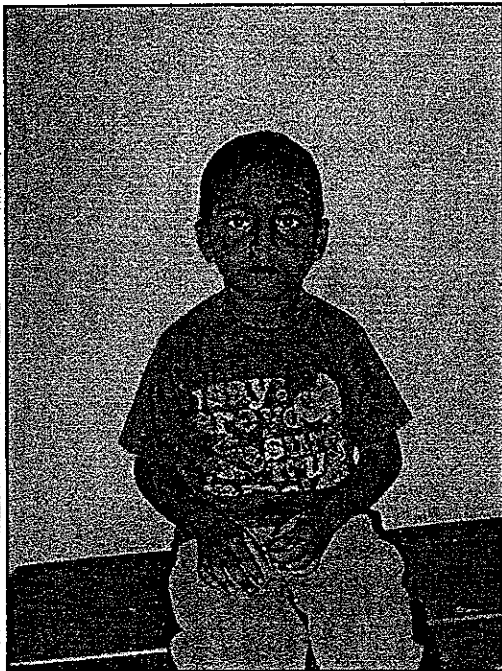
Surendra was in the Nepali Government Hospital for three weeks, but showed little improvement.

ISIS felt his treatment was substandard and decided to consult doctors in the United States.

"After some tough negotiating with the government hospital, who initially refused to let us take Surendra elsewhere, we moved him to Patan Hospital, which is now the place we take all seriously ill children," she added.

Ms Exel said Surendra recovered rapidly with the new treatment, and within a week he was released.

"The doctors at Patan Hospital stated that he was so unwell when admitted that had we not brought him to them, he would have died within days."



Surendra - before the operation

Govinda's story

Nine months ago, four-year-old Govinda was terribly ill and in constant and severe pain.

Today he is a healthy, happy child living in one of the ISIS foster homes in Nepal.

When the ISIS Foundation first met Govinda he was living with a child trafficker under appalling conditions.

Leonie Exel, ISIS general manager, said: "He was sickly with a chest infection and in constant pain."

"Doctors discovered that he had a very large hole in his heart, limiting his oxygen intake and depleting his immune system."

She said Govinda needed immediate surgery to repair the hole.

"The surgery was an extremely high risk procedure and doctors warned that he may not survive the operation."

"On the other hand if nothing was done he would live for - perhaps - another six years, with his heart deteriorating monthly, and dying a painful death."

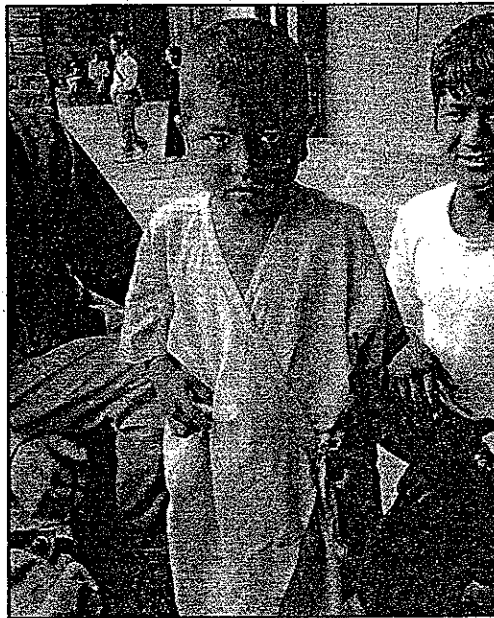
Govinda had the operation on December 1, 2005.

"Words cannot express how happy and relieved we were when we heard Govinda had survived the operation."

"Govinda is healthy, has lots of energy and is always in high spirits. It is hard to believe that he was so ill a few months ago," she added.



A healthy and happy Surendra



Govinda - before the operation



Govinda - after the operation

Civil war at the top of the world

Nepal has been under the sway of a monarchy or ruling family for most of its known history.

A brief experiment with multi-party politics in 1959 ended with King Mahendra suspending parliament and taking sole charge.

Democratic politics was introduced in 1991 after popular protests, but it has been extremely factionalised with frequent changes in government.

The current monarch, King Gyanendra has twice assumed executive powers – in 2002 and 2005.

Meanwhile, Maoist rebels intent on setting up a communist republic have been waging a campaign against the constitutional monarchy in a conflict that has left more than 12,000 people dead since it started in 1967.

The United Nations says the rebellion has displaced more than 100,000 people.

The UN envoy in the country says the use of torture by government forces and rebels was routine.

How you can help

- Donate to the ISIS Foundation or the ISIS Foundation (UK) by credit or debit card on www.donations.bm

- Email ISIS financial controller on Karen@isis.bm if you would like to donate from the US and receive tax deductibility, or have any queries about donating

- Join the Kathmandu Kids Club as a Patron (\$1,000 per year) or as a Member (\$360 per year) on www.kathmandukidsclub.com

- Volunteer – email Julia@kathmandukidsclub.com to see what volunteer job options might suit you

- All cheques should be made payable to the ISIS Foundation, and mailed to 35 Crow Lane, East Broadway, Paget, HM 20

ISIS Foundation on a mission

Continued from Page 4

"Our mission is very clear - it is to help and support Nepalese children in serious need.

"By joining our club, members make a direct and positive contribution to ease the plight of children in a country ravaged by poverty and war," he explained.

ISIS has made a financial and ethical commitment to the children that will stretch over many years.

Ms Exel said: "We are legally responsible for the children until they are 16 years of age. This means that we have a minimum responsibility for the next 12 years, as the youngest child is now only four.

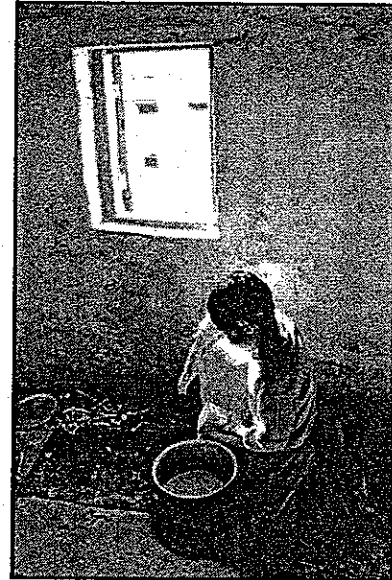
"However, we are ethically responsible for the children until we can move them into the next phase of their lives in a healthy way."

Running the ISIS homes and looking after the children is very expensive and Ms Exel said the charity urgently needs financial help from members of the public.

"It's expensive to run these homes, especially at the moment, as we are setting up, buying new clothes, paying school enrolment fees, and buying large items like huge water filters to make sure even the water the kids bathe in is safe from disease."

Providing foster homes for the Nepalese children is just one of many projects the ISIS Foundation manages in Nepal. Other projects include:

- Supporting two health care workers and a laboratory technician who work out of a Monastery and provide health



care to over 6,000 impoverished people

- Supporting the wages and children's support costs (medical, dental and family support) of "Hands in Outreach," a small but very effective charity which provides support to 106 children

- Funding for the Nepali "Women's Foundation" Women and Children's shelters in Kathmandu.

These shelters help dozens of women and children, all of whom are the victims of violence.

ISIS helps with funding for staff wages, school costs for the children and furnishings for the shelter.

The ISIS Foundation also raises funds to support a number of charity projects in the country of Uganda.