

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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Questions

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RESPONSE

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Considerable information on the Help Medical Foundation is provided through its association with Direct Relief International (a US-based international non-profit humanitarian medical relief organisation) and the United States Consular office in Douala. A May 2008 article in *Eden*, an English-language Cameroonian newspaper from Limbe City in South-West Province, on donations given to Help Medical Foundation by Direct Relief International includes details on personnel and work practices:

An international organisation known as Direct Relief International last 3 May 2008 through Robert Heater; a representative from the US consular office in Douala donated wheel chairs, Tri-cycles, medical kits and some medicines to Help Medical Foundation of Bonaberi in Douala.

During the official handing over ceremony, Robert Heater applauded the great works done by Help Medical Foundation for the community of Bonaberi in Douala and other medical institutions. He equally commended the support Help Medical Foundation has consistently shown to provide needed medical care for those who could not have the means to sustain their medical cost.

Heater prayed that this work will continue and inspire many others to also donate so that others may share in these benefits. Dr. George Assam, General Coordinator and member of the management board, accompanied by the legal adviser, Barrister Philip Forsang Ndikum, on their part, thanked the US consul and the donor agency “Direct Relieve International” for their kind gesture. They also recalled that this is not the first time that Direct Relieve International is donating to Help Medical Foundation.

Asked how these medical equipments shall be put to use for the benefit of the community; Dr Assam said Help Medical Foundation is a liaison reference centre and since in Cameroon everything is regularised, he will in turn donate some to either the Limbe Provincial Hospital or the Lanquintinie Hospital so that a larger number of the population will also benefit.

Help Medical Foundation provides out affordable care to the population in semi-urban and urban environments, which make up about 50% of the cities by carrying out medical consultations on individuals, diagnosing clinically medical conditions, carrying out laboratory investigations, providing appropriate treatment to conditions requiring medications, doing X-ray diagnosis and helping therapeutic approaches, carrying out ultrasonic studies to understand obstetrical conditions of pregnant women, doing prostate health education in men over 50 years of age and doing ultrasound to study internal organs in both adults and infants.

The foundation also carries out HIV/AIDS focus and community health education.

It should be noted that Help Medical Foundation came into existence in 9 March 1994 and was officially legalised by the then Senior Divisional Officer for Fako but was later moved to Douala (Hofmann, B. K. 2008, ‘International Organisation Donates To Medical Foundation’, *Eden*, 14 May <http://www.edennewspaper.com/content/view/1922/102/> – Accessed 4 November 2008 – Attachment 1).

A Direct Relief International Program Officer, Sarah Thurston, provided further details on the Help Medical Foundation when describing her experiences in Africa in January 2007:

I spent the day with Dr. George Assam, one of 30 radiologists in Cameroon, and director of the Help Medical Foundation, a charitable medical facility located in Bonaberi, an over-populated, under-developed urban slum section of Douala. For 80,000 people in this part of Bonaberi, this eight-bed in-patient clinic is the only source of affordable health care. Over 75 percent of the patient load, which averages 30 per day, is unable to pay anything for services and receive examination and treatment free of charge. With barely enough income to cover medicines, reagents for the laboratory, and salaries, the facility is hard-pressed to meet its budget each month. The three doctors on staff work on a volunteer basis (running private practices on the side in Douala for income), and the nurses and lab tech receive a nominal stipend each month.

Dr. Assam is the fiery, charismatic glue that holds the whole charitable operation together. A specialist doctor at the Douala government referral hospital part time, Assam founded the clinic and takes great pride in knowing on a personal basis, the residents of the Bonaberi area and their health needs, personally encouraging them to adopt healthy lifestyle habits for better nutrition and HIV/AIDS prevention, a growing problem in Cameroon (10 to 11 percent adult prevalence rate, though some statistics put it as low as seven percent).

Poor nutrition and very crowded living conditions along with lack of access to clean drinking water make disease prevalent in Bonaberi. Dr. Assam treats many cases of malaria, respiratory illness, complications related to HIV/AIDS, all made worse by inadequate nutrition. “The greatest health problem in Africa” he says “is hunger” though he quickly adds the problems of infectious disease. For his part, Dr. Assam has been very pleased with the

supplies sent by Direct Relief that arrived last August. They have been very valuable in treating infections in both children and adults that come through the Help Medical Foundation's Bonaberi compound (Thurston, S. 2007, 'Notes from the Field – Africa', Direct Relief International website

<http://www.directrelief.org/PressCenter/Commentary/NotesFromTheField/AfricaEntry.aspx?id=1936&blogid=430> – Accessed 4 November 2008 – Attachment 2).

The Help Medical Foundation is listed as one of numerous partner organisations in Direct Relief International's 2007 Annual Report (Direct Relief International 2007, *Annual Report 2007*, p.22

http://www.directrelief.org/uploadedFiles/Press_Center/Publications/Annual_Reports/2007DIRAnnualreport.pdf – Accessed 4 November 2008 – Attachment 3).

Further details on personnel and the work done by the Foundation are available in an October 2006 article on the Postnewsline.com website, criticising Cameroonian customs for having temporarily held up a consignment of drugs donated to it by Direct Relief International:

A consignment of drugs worth 7000 US dollars, donated by a charity group, Direct Relief International in the United States, was blocked for close to two months by the Douala Ports Authority who insisted that customs duties be paid before the drugs are taken out.

Direct Relief International donated the drugs to a charity group, Help Medical Foundation in Douala to cater for underprivileged children.

...The customs finally squeezed out one million franc CFA from Help Medical Foundation, before letting go last week, the medical relief goods which arrived the Douala Port since August.

US Embassy's Appreciation

Help Medical Foundation organised a ceremony at the foundation's premises in Bonaberi, Douala, on October 6, to acknowledge the arrival of the medical relief goods, as well as present them to the public.

The Director of Help Medical Foundation, Dr George T. Assam, hailed Direct Relief International for the donation to assist less privileged persons. He noted that Help Medical Foundation was created in 1998, with the idea of helping less privileged persons in the society, through medical consultation and treatment for comparatively a very little amount.

He said the health establishment has two attending physicians and a number of other health personnel. "We go for efficient but less expensive drugs in the treatment of our patients", he added.

Assam stated that a number of organisations abroad have over the years made donations of medical relief goods to the Foundation, thanks to the credibility which the Foundation has established. He expressed happiness that Relief International acted promptly in supplying the drugs.

Assam, however, regretted that the Customs Service in the country callously blocked the donations, demanding money while the drugs were meant to help less privileged Cameroonians. He said the act paints a negative picture about the Cameroon Administration to international humanitarian organisations.

...The Vice Consul at the US Consulate in Douala, Robert Heater appreciated the humanitarian work, which Help Medical Foundation is doing for the population of Bonaberi. The Diplomat told the management of Help Medical Foundation “the US Embassy applauds this effort and hopes that this work will continue and inspire others to give.

Free Drugs For AIDS Patients

Assam presented a consignment of antiretroviral drugs worth FCFA 1.5 million donated to the Foundation by a drug manufacturing company, Bristol Myers of Britain. He stated that the drugs are free to HIV/AIDS patients.

Assam explained that only official treatment centres for HIV/AIDS patients, are supposed to give out such drugs. He said that the Foundation would distribute the drugs to some treatment centres in the country, like the Laquintinie Hospital in Douala (Pefok, J. D. 2006, ‘Customs Block Medical Supplies For Underprivileged’, Postnewsline.com website, 12 October http://www.postnewsline.com/2006/10/customs_block_m.html – Accessed 4 November 2008 – Attachment 4).

The e-Meditech website listed the Help Medical Foundation as one of a number of “Programs Needing Donations”. The website noted that the Help Medical Foundation “is an in and out patient Medical facility that cares for an average of 30 men & women at a time with severe HIV/AIDS infections”. The ‘Contact Us’ page lists Dr. George Assam as e-Meditech’s contact within Cameroon, noting that he was “Program Director Cameroon, L’hopital Laquintinie de Douala”. Phone and fax contact details for Dr. Assam are also given (‘Help Medical Foundation HIV/AIDS’ (undated), e-Meditech website http://www.e-meditech.org/project_help_medical_foundation.php – Accessed 4 November 2008 – Attachment 5; ‘Contact Us’ (undated), e-Meditech website <http://www.e-meditech.org/contact.php> – Accessed 4 November 2008 – Attachment 6).

A brief summary of Help Medical Foundation is also provided on the AfDevInfo.com website:

Help Medical Foundation, an 80-bed referral hospital in Douala, Cameroon in 2005 to help raise the level of care available to Cameroonians seeking care at this urban facility. Help Medical Foundation is one of the main providers of health services to a large population living in the slums of Douala, Cameroon’s commercial capital. With two physicians, 10 nurses, two lab technicians, and one pharmacist, Help Medical Foundation sees as many as 100 outpatients per day and treats over 1,000 AIDS patients per year (‘Help Medical Foundation’ (undated), AfDevInfo.com website http://www.afdevinfo.com/htmlreports/org%5Corg_53378.html – Accessed 4 November 2008 – Attachment 7).

The Help Medical Foundation is also listed on the following websites:

- Help Medical Foundation listed as endorsing the World Cancer Declaration 2008 (‘World Cancer Declaration 2008: Organizations’ 2008, International Union Against Cancer website http://www.uicc.org/wcd/endorsement_list.php?organization – Accessed 4 November 2008 – Attachment 8).
- Help Medical Foundation listed as endorsing the testimony of Nils Daulaire, President and CEO of the Global Health Council, before the US House

Foreign Operations Appropriations Subcommittee in March 2000 (Daulaire, N. 2000, 'Testimony on FY 2001 Foreign Operations Spending Before the House Foreign Operations Appropriations Subcommittee', Global Health Council website, 30 March <http://www.globalhealth.org/news/article/429> – Accessed 4 November 2008 – Attachment 9).

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

Search Engines

Google <http://www.google.com.au/>

Ask <http://www.ask.com/>

Exalead <http://www.exalead.com/search>

Yahoo! <http://search.yahoo.com/>

Live <http://www.live.com>

Government Information & Reports

Immigration & Refugee Board of Canada <http://www.irb.gc.ca/>

UK Home Office <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk>

US Department of State <http://www.state.gov/>

Refworld <http://www.refworld.org/>

Non-Government Organisations

Amnesty International website <http://www.amnesty.org/>

Human Rights Watch <http://www.hrw.org/>

Doctors without Borders <http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/>

Direct Relief International website <http://www.directrelief.org/>

International News & Politics

Eden <http://www.edennewspaper.com/>

Postnewsline.com website <http://www.postnewsline.com/>

Databases:

BACIS (DIAC Country Information database)

REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)

ISYS (RRT Research & Information database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State Reports)

RRT Library Catalogue

List of Attachments

1. Hofmann, B. K. 2008, 'International Organisation Donates to Medical Foundation', *Eden*, 14 May <http://www.edennewspaper.com/content/view/1922/102/> – Accessed 4 November 2008.
2. Thurston, S. 2007, 'Notes from the Field – Africa', Direct Relief International website <http://www.directrelief.org/PressCenter/Commentary/NotesFromTheField/AfricaEntry.aspx?id=1936&blogid=430> – Accessed 4 November 2008.
3. Direct Relief International 2007, *Annual Report 2007* http://www.directrelief.org/uploadedFiles/Press_Center/Publications/Annual_Reports/2007DRIannualreport.pdf – Accessed 4 November 2008.

4. Pefok, J. D. 2006, 'Customs Block Medical Supplies for Underprivileged', Postnewsline.com website, 12 October
http://www.postnewsline.com/2006/10/customs_block_m.html – Accessed 4 November 2008.
5. 'Help Medical Foundation. HIV/AIDS' (undated), e-Meditech website http://www.e-meditech.org/project_help_medical_foundation.php – Accessed 4 November 2008.
6. 'Contact Us' (undated), e-Meditech website <http://www.e-meditech.org/contact.php> – Accessed 4 November 2008.
7. 'Help Medical Foundation' (undated), AfDevInfo.com website
http://www.afdevinfo.com/htmlreports/org%5Corg_53378.html – Accessed 4 November 2008.
8. 'World Cancer Declaration 2008: Organizations' 2008, International Union against Cancer website http://www.uicc.org/wcd/endorsement_list.php?organization – Accessed 4 November 2008.
9. Daulaire, N. 2000, 'Testimony on FY 2001 Foreign Operations Spending before the House Foreign Operations Appropriations Subcommittee', Global Health Council website, 30 March <http://www.globalhealth.org/news/article/429> – Accessed 4 November 2008.