



Zairean refugee

*An overview of the development of the EMAS emergency response plan.*

Missions and conflict do not seem to fit well together; or do they? Have you ever wondered what happens to mission teams in war zones? The need for medical aid, clean water, shelter and the gospel becomes acute, even overwhelming. Public response increases tenfold in times of crisis and missions are compelled to continue their work, often relocating to areas of greatest need and danger. **It has been said that catastrophes and war enable many aid organizations to survive because of donor generosity at such times.** EMAS does not usually work in war zones and yet we believe that, as an overseas mission organization, we need to be prepared for emergencies.

The nature and perception of missions has changed over the last twenty years. It used to be possible to guarantee protection for mission teams because they were known to be politically neutral. This option of neutrality is no longer open to us.

Sally Patrick, an aid worker, is an EMAS representative on the Focus Editorial Board.

## Risk, Ransom & Response

**Missions work in times of war**

by Sally Patrick, MSW

Today the Canadian military, the US military and others all offer medical aid in war torn areas whilst at the same time being involved in the conflict itself. Mission teams no longer stand clearly apart from military action when offering medical aid. We may still know and feel that we are neutral but in the countries where we work **there will be those who identify us with the aims and behaviour of the military.** We cannot avoid antagonism and hostility even whilst offering aid to all in need.

In many areas, as we double our efforts to meet the need and bring in more aid, our mission teams become more of a target. Each year thousands of robberies, hold-ups and break-ins occur on mission compounds. According to a United Nations Report, 22–40 aid workers are killed each year around the world whilst on duty. This figure does not include road accidents.

Africa remains the riskiest part of the world in which to work. During the eight years from the late 1980s to 1996, I was involved in many emergency situations in Central Africa, including a coup in Burundi, the Rwandan refugee situation in Congo, being shot at, vehicle accidents and break downs, bombardment, almost daily military hold-ups, military interrogation and

theft of personal and mission funds. In none of these situations did I have an emergency response plan in place. Today, ten years later, such a plan is imperative. Most aid agencies are quite clear in their refusal to pay ransoms in hostage taking events but we can and must do more to protect our mission teams.

We believe in prayer. We know that God directs our going out and our coming in. We know that all things work together for good to those who are called according to his purpose, that nothing happens by chance and that God knows our every need. Yet, we may also face situations of extreme danger where the outcome is uncertain in human terms.

EMAS has an operational framework for emergency situations. The information provided to the EMAS National Office and the precautions taken with our teams result in an organized, efficient response to emergencies. Team protection is obviously our priority as is the protection of EMAS as an organization. Our future work depends very much on how we deal with an emergency on the field involving a mission team. EMAS mission teams are required to carry more than one cell phone per team. Medical insurance is essential, although we recognize that insurance may be cancelled in some areas of the world

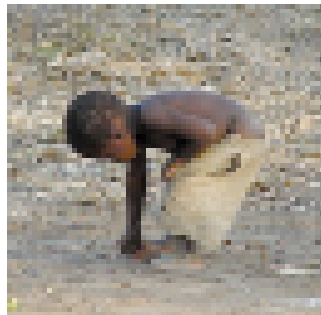
today. We ask mission teams to assign one team member to the pastoral care of the team, a task that becomes of paramount importance during an emergency.

More travellers overseas die in road accidents than from any other cause of death. Car maintenance is a problem in most parts of the world and so we ask our teams to check the state of their vehicle's tires before undertaking a journey in their host country. We ask that they look at the wheel nuts every day since they frequently loosen on poor roads. A valid driver's licence and vehicle insurance is taken for granted in Canada, but most of the world is less able to afford such things; hence the standard of driving competence is variable.

It is easy to neglect team orientation in the host country. As a safety measure, it is always beneficial to study a local map, however out of date, and essential to know in which direction the team is travelling, how many hours the journey is expected to take, and where to find the nearest hospital en route. In remote areas, a first aid kit, extra engine oil and brake fluid are a must! [The Canadian Embassy or consulate can help in emergencies, but only if they know there are Canadians in the country! It is easy to register on-line.](#)

If they have the necessary information, the EMAS National Office will also help in an emergency, whether it is a road accident or an

outbreak of hostilities. Before departure, there will be a profile of each host country at the National Office, giving details of the terrain, political situation and security risks the team is likely to meet. These country profiles are maintained by the National Office and remain in Canada. They are verified by the team leader before departure. In addition, the team leader provides the National Office with each team member's personal information, including passport details, insurance, and itineraries. This information is specific to the mission trip in progress.




Communication is a key element to an efficient emergency response. Cell phones and the Internet have revolutionised team missions, but in remote areas we can easily be out of range of such things. The GPS satellite system can be rented quite cheaply before departure and is invaluable. Where cell phones can be used, it is important to know whose cell phone works where! A telephone cascade to use in an emergency is something to organize before leaving the country. The



Stuck in Chad

team leader is usually the person who alerts the National Office of an emergency and maintains communication throughout the emergency and response plan. He/she is the person to communicate advice and direction from the National Office to the mission team. Any type of emergency necessitates an analysis of the crisis in the light of the data given to the National Office prior to departure. An appropriate response level is then determined—[red for high alert, orange for moderate, and yellow for low alert](#). Each level has its required action. It is always essential that every team member complies with the response plan. A curfew may be necessary or it may be necessary to re-locate and re-evaluate the situation. Finally the emergency response plan may call for evacuation.

*Emergencies always come with a cost. As missions people, we are very good at responding to other people's needs. However, after an emergency in the field, we ourselves need a supportive de-briefing process on return to Canada. De-briefing is part of the EMAS emergency response plan and is required for each team member. We recognize that thorns in the flesh need to be removed. In the same way, shock, loss and fear can be minimized in a well organized emergency response plan and with the help of our God whose nature is always to have mercy.* 



Tents in Zaïre, 1994