Government minister visits Sussex-based charity to double aid to deliver 324,000 operations for blind people

Thursday 22 January, 2015

Today, during a visit to Haywards Heath-based charity, Sightsavers, International Development Minister, Baroness Northover, announced that the UK government will double the amount raised by the charity's latest fundraising appeal to £9.7 million. The money raised so far is enough for the charity to carry out more than 324,000 operations for visually impaired people living in some of the world's poorest countries.

Sightsavers' A Million Miracles Appeal which launched in October was match-funded pound for pound by the UK government for the first three months, meaning that even more people in developing countries will have their sight restored. The appeal continues until 2018 with the aim of raising £30 million to fund one million sight-restoring surgeries for people across Africa and Asia with blinding eye conditions such as cataract.

Baroness Northover heard about the first 'miracle', which was carried out on World Sight Day (October 9) for 69-year-old Winesi March from Malawi. Sightsavers broadcast Winesi's operation live to an online audience to launch the ambitious appeal.

Baroness Northover said: *"Sightsavers, based here in Haywards Heath, is helping hundreds of thousands of people in some of the poorest parts of Africa to regain their sight through their Million Miracles appeal. Trachoma and cataracts are diseases which cause both physical and mental distress, as people can lose their sight and their livelihoods.*

"The UK government has matched public donations to this appeal so together we can help victims of debilitating diseases to return to work or education, giving them back their independence and control of their own lives."

The UK government's Department for International Development (DFID) supports a number of Sightsavers projects, including those fighting to eliminate neglected tropical diseases. This is the second Sightsavers appeal DFID has match funded. The 2011 Christmas appeal rose over £3.3 million in total.

Caroline Harper, Sightsavers' CEO, said of the visit: "*It is a real honour to have the Baroness visit our Haywards Heath office. Eye care treatments are some of the most cost effective health interventions in the world. For just £30 we are able to give sight back to people like Winesi who told us that the operation has completely turned his life around. We were thrilled to be able to tell the Baroness about the life-changing work we do, and thank her for her department's ongoing support."*

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Notes to Editors

About Sightsavers:

1.Sightsavers is a registered UK charity (Registered charity numbers 207544 and SC038110) that works in more than 30 developing countries to prevent blindness, restore sight and advocate for social inclusion and equal rights for people with disabilities. www.sightsavers.net

2.There are 39 million blind people in the world; 80% of all blindness can be prevented or cured.

3.In the six decades since its foundation, Sightsavers has:

- supported over 483.4 million treatments for blinding and potentially blinding conditions.
- carried out over 8.4 million operations to restore sight.
- trained more than 0.5 million primary eye care workers.

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- carried out rehabilitation training for 149,000 blind or low vision beneficiaries.
- supported 30,000 blind or low vision children to gain a school education.

- 4. Sightsavers' A Million Miracles Appeal launches in October 2014 to raise funds over the next three years to perform one million sight-restoring surgeries across Africa and Asia.
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- 5.For as little as £30 Sightsavers can give someone their sight back through surgery.

About DFID:

1. DFID supports a number of appeals and campaigns concerning visual impairments and blindness in developing countries. In 2012 DFID made £50 million available to support the control and global mapping of trachoma. DFID also match-funded £50 million to The Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust for programmes across the Commonwealth on avoidable blindness. The UK is also funding the Global Trachoma Mapping Project (GTMP) that is identifying the disease burden of trachoma in unmapped areas that are suspected to be trachoma endemic. This will ensure that resources for trachoma control are targeted to the people who are most in need.

2. In 2014 DFID invested £39 million in a consortium of International Coalition for Trachoma Control (ICTC) members, managed by SightSavers. The funding is supporting the implementation of the Surgery, Antibiotics, Facial Cleanliness and Environmental Improvements (SAFE) strategy in countries like Ethiopia, Zambia and Tanzania where the disease is highly endemic.

3.UK Aid Match was set up by the UK government's Department for International Development (DFID) to give a boost to public support for charities working in the developing world. It doubles public donations to appeals run by British international development charities, in recognition of both the public's generosity and the wide range of causes they support. For more information, go to www.gov.uk/ukaidmatch.

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