

# Israeli Humanitarian Missions

## Israeli Doctor Saves lives during riots in Solomon Islands

Sixteen months ago Dr. Yehoshua Rubin, an anesthetist from Rabin Medical Center in Petah Tikva, was sent on a medical mission through a joint medical initiative of the Israeli Medical Association and the Foreign Ministry's MASHAV.

After little more than a year in the Solomon Islands, Doctor Rubin still refuses to leave even though his own life may be in danger following recent elections in the country, which resulted in violence and unrest in the streets of Honiara, the capital. Honiara's Chinatown district was almost razed in the violence sparked by Snyder Rini's election.

Dr. Rubin refused to leave with the other foreigners who fled the country, as there was no one to fill his place.

"There are riots in the streets", said Dr. Rubin "but it doesn't matter to me. I am the only anesthetist in the country and my conscience doesn't allow me to leave."

"In the last week dozens of injured people arrived at the city hospital", said Rubin. "And more are arriving each day. I am the only anesthetist in the whole country. In Tel Aviv you have more than enough anesthetists, here they depend on me".

"Everything is closed all the stores and banks. I am here with my wife and daughter and we can't buy food or take out money." added Rubin.

It was finally the actions of the Australian army, sending in additional troops, that helped calm the situation.

"My family and I are the only Israelis and Jews in the country, I delayed my stay for an additional two months in the hope that until then someone would replace me. It's hard living under these conditions but my conscience won't allow me to leave; there are four operating rooms and I am the only anesthetist".

## Israeli doctors assist Vietnam in heart surgery for children

A group of Israeli heart doctors from the Save a Child's Heart (SACH) organization arrived in Vietnam in March to give educative training on children's heart surgery to Vietnamese doctors. The training encompassed teaching Vietnamese surgeons at Israel's Wolfson Medical Center and sending Israeli experts to Vietnam to exchange experiences with Vietnamese colleagues and treat Vietnamese children. The Israel-based humanitarian organization has, since 1996, conducted heart operations for 1,400 children in 24 countries.



## Israel doctors treat AIDS-infected Ethiopian children with medicine and laughter

A program launched by Israeli medical infectious disease specialist Professor Danny Engelhard, head of the Department of Pediatric Infectious Diseases and AIDS at Hadassah University Hospital in Jerusalem, has succeeded in decreasing the fatalities among Ethiopian children infected with the HIV/AIDS virus. The program involves treating the children with anti-retroviral therapy, according to the initiator of the project.

In Ethiopia, close to 60,000 children become infected with HIV each year. It is also estimated that 2.2 million people – 200,000 of them children – are living with the virus in Ethiopia, making the country the third largest infected population in the world.

Anti-retroviral drugs inhibit the replication of HIV. When antiretroviral drugs are given in combination, HIV replication and immune deterioration can be delayed, and survival and quality of life improved. However, in Ethiopia, the treatment is

provided only for those who can afford the drugs. Engelhard first became involved with AIDS patients in Ethiopia through a training program for Ethiopian doctors and nurses held in Israel.

"Two medical teams, which went to Israel for four weeks of training, have been able to establish pediatric AIDS clinics in which many children are currently being treated. This program has continued and we have another team coming to Israel for training next month," he stated.

The program is supported by the International Training and Education Center on HIV (ITECH) and the the American Center of Disease Control (CDC), under the auspices of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Israeli Embassy in Addis Ababa.

As a result of the training program, Engelhard first traveled to Ethiopia in February 2005, and was instrumental in launching anti-retroviral therapy for children at the Mother Theresa Missionaries of Charity Orphanage Center, which houses 400 orphaned children with AIDS.

Engelhard said that that only a few hundred of the approximately 200,000 Ethiopian children infected with AIDS receive anti-retroviral treatment, which can transform the fatal disease into a chronic one.

"Since the anti-retroviral therapy began, the number of children who died of the disease and related cases dropped to only three. Treatments have been given to 130 children, who are doing very well. In Jerusalem, we have not lost a single child to AIDS for more than 10 years and there are children whom I have followed for 15-16 years. In Ethiopia, too, with more effort, I believe we can prevent all deaths from the disease," Engelhard said.

Engelhard led a group of Israeli doctors and volunteers on a return visit recently to the orphanage. Aware that the patients he's working with are also children, Engelhard included two 'medical clowns' in his delegation. ■