

“My hope for the community is that we can live in peace and that we can earn enough money to live.”



Read the story of former child soldier Taps on pages 4-7.

# Kin

Your support helps create long-lasting change.  
September 2023

# Be our friend for the future



“Even if we come from different religions, we always choose peace over conflict.”  
 – Noridjah Hasim

The joy on the faces of Eleanor Reomalos and Noridjah Hasim is infectious – we couldn’t help smiling when we saw their photo! Their holding hands is a symbol of their unwavering connection: friends for life.

**E**leanor is Christian. Noridjah is Muslim. Historically, tension between their two communities led to local conflict in Mindanao in the Philippines. Eleanor and Noridjah’s friendship was forged when they participated in peacebuilding workshops developed locally and delivered by VSO, enabling communities to come together for the greater good.

“The friendship that I have with Noridjah is a great example to other community members that Muslims and Christians can be friends and live peacefully together,” says Eleanor.

Their friendship embodies what both communities are striving towards: peace and prosperity. This hard-won peace has been built through trust, kindness and compassion – the exact same qualities we see in VSO supporters.

So many of you who have left VSO gifts in your Wills are not only friends to us now, but friends for the future as well. That’s why we want to say thank you. ✨

## YOUR GIFTS IN WILLS TEAM

Gifts in Wills at VSO is managed by Rosie and Heidi. The two of us are also good friends (not just colleagues!) and bond over our love of nature – we’re always sending each other photos of our favourite trees!

If you’d like to know more about leaving a gift in your Will, please get in touch with us.

We’d love to hear from you.

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“Peace is essential in building successful, functioning communities. And yet, conflict continues to cast a shadow over so many lives.”

On pages 4-7 you can read about how past conflict in the Philippines continues to impact lives. Taps, who is pictured below, was one of many children made to join the frontline as a child soldier who now faces prejudice and discrimination from neighbouring communities.

It’s so sad to hear the stories of these young people. The fact that children, who should be protected and nurtured, have instead been subjected to violence and manipulation is heartbreaking. They’ve had their childhood stolen from them, but I’m proud of our work to reintegrate them into their communities and to give them hope for the future.

Former child soldiers like Taps are so grateful for your support. Your continued generosity empowers volunteers to foster trust in communities, addressing marginalisation and aiding recovery.

If you are able, please donate again today and help reach more victims of conflict. Thank you so much.

**Philip Goodwin**  
 Chief Executive of VSO



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# BUILDING LASTING PEACE IN THE PHILIPPINES

VSO volunteers are building pathways to peace by supporting former child soldiers and victims of six decades of violence across Mindanao Island, southern Philippines.

The aftermath of conflict is devastatingly difficult for people as they face prejudice and poverty. VSO urgently needs to reach more victims to help them rebuild their lives and livelihoods.

## CHILDHOODS TORN APART BY WAR

Taps remembers being 8 years old and hearing gunshots at school. Violence was deep-rooted between local communities and ethnic groups on Mindanao Island, which, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority, in 2021, held one of the highest poverty rates in the country at 30%.

Tragically, Taps became a child soldier at just 12 years old. He was indoctrinated by his father, Salman, into the cause of defending his Moro Muslim community against other ethnic groups on the island. Salman was a Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) commander.

Salman passed this responsibility down to his son, his own warn-torn childhood being littered with memories of community killings and women being slaughtered. Salman was forced from his homeland by extremists before joining the MILF in 1968 and becoming commander in 1975.

“War is not good; it destroys families. Our intention was for our Muslim population to have our own community in a non-violent way.”

– Salman, former base commander

Both Taps and Salman have been ostracised for their tough choices. Today, Moro children and young people continue to face prejudice and discrimination from outside their community for a conflict that happened before they were born. >



Taps was forced into battle at just 12 years old.

©VSO/LISA MARIE DAVID

**TACKLING TENSIONS, PREJUDICE AND POVERTY**

With a population of over 27 million, Mindanao Island has a vast array of ethnic groups, religious communities, and political clans. Today, they live a co-existence built on a fragile peace deal struck in 2014. Mindanao Island remains at the forefront of the country’s security concerns. The future is far from certain for its many communities who are trying to build on foundations fractured by prejudice, violence and fear.

Further, Mindanao’s idyllic coastal ecosystems are some of the most heavily fished and are acutely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Many households dependent on the fishing industry see their livelihoods devastated by typhoons, earthquakes and flooding. This can exacerbate hostilities as people struggle to eat, earn a living and re-integrate into society.

**BUILDING PATHWAYS TO PEACE AND PROSPERITY**

VSO’s stabilising presence is helping to protect the peace in this fragile community. Today, Salman is a committed volunteer, working at a

VSO eco-tourism site in southern Mindanao. His previously isolated community has been transformed thanks to an innovative boardwalk project built by community volunteers, for which VSO provided the materials. The boardwalk is a new pathway to explore the marshland and observe rare species of birds. Salman patrols the peaceful waterways in a boat provided by VSO and feels proud of his community’s achievements.

Taps works alongside his father at the site, harvesting hyacinths for bio-fertiliser and waterlilies for salad leaves to generate income. He is educated, trained in business management, and speaks on behalf of former child soldiers. Increasingly, former child soldiers like Taps are learning how to prevent the riverways from becoming clogged and flooded by harvesting the rich plant life.

Peace, and the beauty of their community, is also helping the Moro people tackle stigma and prejudice from other communities left scarred from decades of conflict. Tourists to the Moro areas, including people previously seen as enemies, can now safely explore the stunning marshland and birdwatch. They are visiting this VSO eco-site at the heart of what was a no-go area, as word begins to spread of this new tranquil oasis.

**YOU ARE HELPING TRANSFORM ATTITUDES AND FUTURES**

VSO supporters like you are helping people rebuild their livelihoods, including helping victims of conflict overcome being excluded and left behind.

Increasingly, marine life and local homes are being destroyed by floods and typhoons, which are becoming more frequent due to climate change. To tackle this, VSO volunteers have provided 1,000 trees to the benefit of over 10,000 people, with the trees acting as a flood defense.

Volunteers have also provided vital training in the production of organic bio-fertiliser from fish waste, vegetables and seaweed crops. It is chemical and pesticide free, using the natural resource of water hyacinth, which is in abundance locally, and harvesting the hyacinth reduces flooding. Community members are looking at selling the product locally to generate income, alongside the money derived from the eco-tourism site when it officially opens to the public later in the year.

“Before, lives were put to waste. There were so many children who became soldiers and never got to fulfil their potential,” says Taps. “Now, if we can earn money through the eco-tourism site, and with that money send our children to school, we can live simply and in peace.”



A community volunteer helps to construct the eco-tourism site.

**HOW YOU CAN HELP TODAY**

Taps explains, “It is easy for young people to get wrapped up in conflict. Sparked by anger, they will get pulled from education into war. I do not want my children to experience that.”

Support from VSO and UK aid through the ACTIVE programme has helped preserve peace and transform lives devastated by conflict. But we urgently need to help hundreds more people rebuild their livelihoods. ✨

“My hope for the community is that we can live in peace and that we can earn enough money to live.” – Taps, former child soldier

©VSO/LISA MARIE DAVID

Sources: Philippine Statistics Authority, Manila Times.

**WE NEED YOU**

Please will you make a special gift today?

Every penny donated can make a difference to individuals like Taps.

There are six more communities healing from conflict that urgently need your support.

[Click here to find out more and make a donation today >](#)

Salman was once the base commander. Now he’s a volunteer, leading change in his community.



# IGNITING CHANGE ACROSS THE WORLD

You are sparking change right now, making it possible for thousands of volunteers to share skills and make a difference to lives worldwide.



## UGANDA THE INSECT REVOLUTIONISING AGRICULTURE

In Uganda, black soldier flies act as waste warriors, recycling food waste into organic fertiliser. Not only does this improve sanitation in urban areas, but through VSO training in the farming of the fly, **3,000 young farmers** are also reaping the benefits of this low-cost, chemical-free fertiliser.



## RWANDA LEAVING NO CHILD BEHIND

Powered by your support, volunteers are training teachers and school leaders in **2,600 primary schools in Rwanda** in how to create their own learning resources using local items, such as turning bottle tops into counters for maths lessons. And, with teachers now making individual plans for children with learning difficulties, every child is now receiving the education they deserve.

## KENYA GIVING GIRLS A SECOND CHANCE

In Kenya, where it's common for girls to drop out of school early due to child marriage, your support has provided catch-up classes to hundreds of girls aged 10-19. Now, 570 girls have re-enrolled in school, and a further **745 have learned a vocational trade** like carpentry or dressmaking, starting them off on a new path in life.



## ZIMBABWE ACCESS TO HIV TREATMENT FOR ALL

In Zimbabwe, ten former-inmates-turned-community volunteers have provided peer-to-peer counselling to prison inmates, sharing **how to prevent and treat HIV**. They are also linking HIV-positive released inmates to health facilities, helping them adhere to their medication and reduce the spread of HIV.

## NEPAL CONVERSATIONS OPENING THE DOOR TO EQUALITY

In Nepal, you're helping tackle gender inequality through **sessions where couples talk and learn** about sexual reproductive rights, family planning and gender-based violence. Supporting 3,000 couples, this project has seen men acknowledge they are equally responsible for household chores, fostering greater harmony and equality.



## CAMBODIA BOOSTING EARNINGS THROUGH RECYCLING

Communities living on the shores of the Tonlé Sap Lake depend on fishing for their income. Yet climate change and overfishing are depleting fish stocks. Through training delivered by 20 VSO volunteers, locals are now equipped with knowledge and tools on **how to create floating gardens from used water bottles**. On these floating platforms, families cultivate vegetables to sell, creating an income and a better future.

PHOTO CREDITS: ©VSO / PAUL WAMBUGU / COLUMBUS MAVHUNGA / SOPHEA CHHEUN / SURAJ SHAKYA / CYNTHIA R MATONHODZE



# FROM SCARCITY TO ABUNDANCE: SARA'S JOURNEY

Sara Khatun, 36, from Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, was once struggling to make ends meet and couldn't afford to send her children to school. With limited knowledge of sustainable farming practices, she faced disappointing harvests and low earnings on her small plot of land. Thanks to your support, Sara's life has now transformed from what it once was.

©VSO/DULAL CHANDRA BISWAS

## CLIMATE-RESILIENT FARMING

Through your support, VSO volunteers trained Sara in modern and climate-resilient farming techniques for vegetable and livestock production. Then, with a small loan from VSO, Sara purchased five chickens and expanded her farmland. A VSO-supported agricultural centre provided her with essential products and services, as well as assistance in creating a business plan.

## FROM HIGH HOPES TO HIGHER YIELDS

The impact has been astounding. Sara's farm output has skyrocketed, enabling her to repay her loan and lease an even larger plot of land. Today, she cultivates a wide variety of vegetables and has expanded her livestock to include two cows, four goats, twelve pigeons and twenty-five chickens.

Her children can now go to school, and, with Sara's assistance, her husband has established a thriving vegetable business. Looking to the future, Sara dreams of purchasing an acre of land, setting up a large poultry farm, and renovating her house.

## BRINGING COMMUNITIES TOGETHER

For years, VSO has been actively working in Cox's Bazar, a region that houses the largest number of refugee camps in the world. Tensions have arisen between the local population and the Rohingya refugees, with many locals feeling overlooked, believing that support from international organisations solely benefits the refugees, despite facing their own significant challenges.



It is within this context that Sara received support through a project specifically designed by VSO to assist the local communities of Cox's Bazar. The project, with its focus on reducing conflict risks and fostering social cohesion, aims to address these critical issues. ✨

[Find out more about this project here >](#)

**“The VSO volunteers have boosted my self-confidence and transformed my life.”**

◀ Sara and her family.

▼ Volunteer Kabir provides Sara with guidance on preventing yellowing of her brinjal plants.



# 1

## VOLCANIC VISTAS

One of the country's most impressive sites is the Danakil Depression, Africa's lowest point at 125 metres below sea level, containing mesmerisingly colourful hot springs, barren salt plains and a quarter of Africa's active volcanoes. It is consistently one of the hottest locations on the planet.

# 2

## INVESTING IN YOUNG LIVES

Ethiopia has a youthful population, with 40% of citizens under 15. To make sure children get the best start in life, in the last six years, together you and VSO volunteers have supported 47 neonatal intensive care units. Most recently, 400 "Mama Kits" have been given to new mothers in need so they have essential items to take care of their baby, like nappies, soap, sanitary pads and a baby blanket.

# 5 THINGS ABOUT ETHIOPIA...

...and the change you are making here. Ethiopia has a rich cultural heritage, incredible scenic diversity, and VSO's work here dates back to 1995. Here are five things about Ethiopia you may not know.

# 3

## WORLD-RENOWNED FOR...

Coffee! The world-famous brew was first discovered in Ethiopia. Another cuisine staple here is *injera*, a flatbread made from an ancient grain native to Ethiopia known as *teff*. It's customary to tear off pieces before scooping up a bite of stew, which typically accompanies the flatbread.

# 4

## BUILDING PEACE

Northern Ethiopia has experienced two years of conflict, leading to devastating consequences such as famine and heightened poverty here. Following the signing of a peace agreement in November 2022, VSO's network of 180 youth volunteers are working in partnership with the Ministry of Peace to maintain and strengthen peace across the country.

# 5

## A UNIQUE CALENDAR

In Ethiopia, time is measured differently. Not only does the calendar have 13 months in each year, but they also use their own clock system. Given that Ethiopia is close to the equator, daylight is reasonably consistent throughout the year, and so the day begins at dawn and ends at dusk, working to a 12-hour clock. ✨

[Learn more about our work in Ethiopia here >](#)



# ACCESS DENIED:

Thousands of girls in Mozambique are locked out of education - will you help them today?

**T**oday, you could give a girl the chance to go back to school. To earn a living. To take back control of her future.



## MEET NORA

Nora lives with her family in the Sofala district of Mozambique. Her mother could not cover the costs of her studies, so she

had to drop out after third grade, aged 13.

As you might already know from our summer appeal, right now in Mozambique, thousands of girls are stuck at home, unable to find a path to a brighter future. For many girls like Nora, it's common to only attend school for less than a year and a half before dropping out due to circumstances beyond their control. The girls are denied access to a life-changing education and a chance at a bright future.

Nora's life could have gone down the path of many girls before her – forced into child marriage and early pregnancy, then trapped into a cycle of continuing poverty.

## EMPOWERING ADOLESCENT GIRLS TO LEARN AND EARN

Thanks to VSO supporters like you, Nora was able to lift herself out of the disastrous cycle that poverty can create. Through her own hard work and the support and encouragement of her teacher, Nora has learnt to read and write and really enjoys

maths. Nora says, "I will stay in class, continue studying, and I want to become a nurse."

VSO's expert education volunteers bring girls who have dropped out of school into VSO-supported learning centres – reclaiming their education and a chance at life. As well as classes, VSO also provides girls with low-cost, solar-powered tablets with interactive content to keep girls learning even if they cannot get to a centre due to childcare issues or extreme weather.

The tablets create the opportunity for girls to accelerate their learning in their own time, fitting years of missed classes into the space of just a few months.

The tablets, the teachers and a safe learning space at the

centres mean that girls like Nora are in the best environment for a quality education, setting them on the path to earning an income and forging a bright future.

## HOW YOU CAN HELP

Education is a right for us all and transforms futures. Yet there are still so many girls denied access to an education. Before 2025, we are aiming to reach a further 3,000 girls who dropped out of education in Mozambique.

A gift from you today could ensure more girls like Nora gain the skills they need to build the bright future they deserve. It could help train more community teachers and give more girls tablets to work with to speed up their learning. ✨

## DONATE HERE

Donate today to help a girl to learn and empower her to earn into the future.

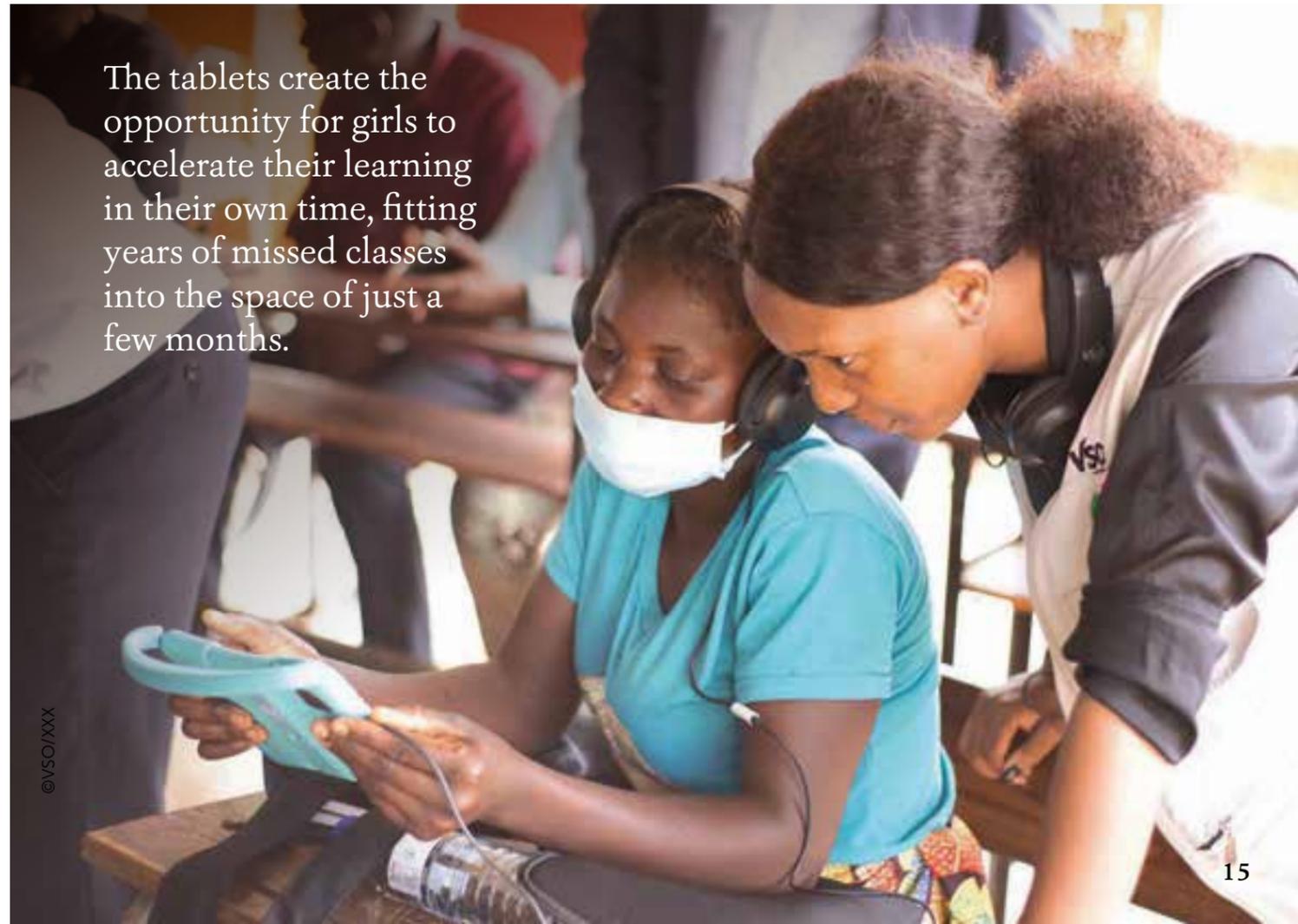
Every penny donated can help make a difference to a girl in need.

[Click here to read more and make a donation to support more girls like Nora >](#)

◀◀ Nora is accelerating her learning through tablet technology.

▼ A teacher assists a student while using a solar-powered tablet.

The tablets create the opportunity for girls to accelerate their learning in their own time, fitting years of missed classes into the space of just a few months.



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## Namaste!

If you are one of the thousands of VSO supporters who have signed up to Sponsor a Volunteer, you will know me already. But, if you don't, I'm Raj, and I'm the lead volunteer for Sponsor a Volunteer.

Sponsor a Volunteer is a way for supporters to get regular updates on VSO's work, hear stories from the projects that I and other volunteers are working on right now, and give a regular donation to keep VSO's important work going.

As a volunteer, I'm putting an end to gender-based violence in my home country of Nepal. It's such a big problem - growing up, I saw so many of my friends drop out of school just because they were girls and, shockingly, as many as one in four women in Nepal experience gender-based violence.

Things CAN change. I recently met Binay and Sumitra. Together we discussed cooperation, equality and the importance of addressing gender-based violence in their relationship. It's a difficult subject, but Binay and Sumitra were open and receptive. They want to create a healthy relationship. Now they pass on this knowledge to their friends too!

But there are many more women and girls to reach who are on the receiving end of violence and discrimination. Help us reach them and sign up to join Sponsor a Volunteer today.



Raj Karki, VSO volunteer.

©VSO/SURAJ SHAKYA

Binay and Sumitra are building a healthier relationship, with support from volunteers like Raj.



### Be part of an incredible movement creating lasting change:

- £8** monthly could provide women with a dignity kit so they are not reliant on their partners for essential items.
- £10** monthly could provide teenagers living in poverty with an essential learning kit so they can attend the group classes.
- £15** could train a volunteer like Raj to work with couples directly to reduce violence at home.



### GET REGULAR UPDATES FROM THE FIELD

Sponsor a volunteer and see first-hand how your donation is changing lives. You can hear from and communicate regularly with one of our amazing volunteers, like Raj. You'll get to know all about them and learn every month how your support is creating long-lasting change.

[Sign up today by visiting the Sponsor a Volunteer page here >](#)

# “ Iris taught me so much about the value of volunteering.”



Donna (left) pictured with Iris.

In memory of **Iris Fowler**, a VSO volunteer who passed away in March 2023. Over twenty years, Iris donated 936 days or 7,500 hours of her time, volunteering in VSO’s London office. Here, former VSO employee Donna Pratt shares her memories of Iris.

I met Iris while working in the supporter care team at VSO. She had already been volunteering for 16 years when I joined!

Iris retired from the civil service in 2000 and spent every Monday for the next 20 years filing, scanning, printing and updating our database. Iris also had beautiful handwriting and would spend afternoons writing letters to our valued supporters with her blue ink fountain pen used specially for that occasion. Her hard work and dedication meant the supporter care team could function more efficiently and devote more resources to where it was most needed.

She enjoyed working in the team with us “young ones”, and without fail every birthday or special event, she would bake a lemon loaf for us to share. Iris was so polite too. I remember one afternoon, she was served a disappointing ham and pea soup in a café, and I could see in her eyes she was not pleased with it, yet she said nothing. Iris was always kind when she knew others were trying their best.

Iris was incredibly humble about volunteering. She spent her time in many other organisations helping children, her church and local community. I got to know Iris very well and continued our

friendship after I had finished working at VSO.

She always joked she was the “older lady who sits in the corner”, but to me, and to so many others in the office, she was a symbol of a lifelong dedication to volunteering, and the difference you can make simply by being there week in, week out.

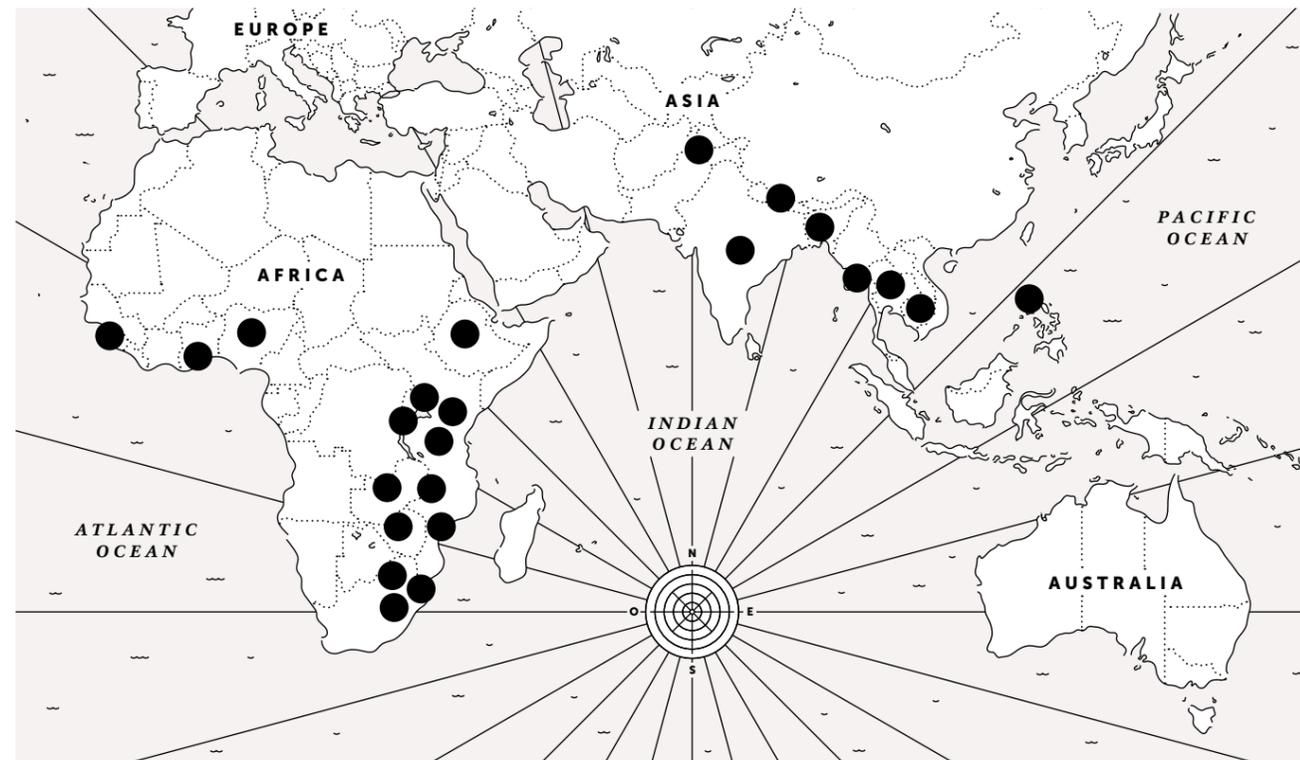
Iris was an extremely valuable member of the team. She taught me so much about our supporters and the value of volunteering.

She helped me to understand that the true value of volunteering lies wherever there is a need. Iris will be missed. ★

## DONATE NOW

Right now, VSO volunteers are working in countries across Africa and Asia to make a difference to the lives of the most marginalised and vulnerable. They need your support. Be part of the change we all want to see - donate today:

[Click here to donate to VSO >](#)



## FOUR WAYS TO HELP



### 1. KNOW SOMEONE WHO WOULD LOVE KIN?

Share a link to Kin magazine so your friends and family can read about VSO’s work too.

### 2. REMEMBER US IN YOUR WILL

You can write your own Will for free – just [visit our website](#).



### 3. DONATE TO VSO

Donations are the best way to ensure VSO’s work can last a lifetime. [Click here to donate to VSO](#).

### 4. SIGN UP TO OUR NEWSLETTER

Be the first to hear about events, updates from the field and ways you can get involved through our VSO newsletter. [Click here to sign up](#).



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Right now, families in conflict-affected communities are becoming trapped in a cycle of poverty. VSO volunteers are on the ground helping people rebuild their lives and generate the income they need to survive.

We urgently need to reach more victims of conflict and build a safer, more peaceful world.

Please consider making a special gift today by clicking here >

