



WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP AND REBUILDING LIVES IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO ~ CARITAS GOMA, KNIGHTS OF THE SOUTHERN CROSS AND CARITAS AUSTRALIA ~

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, complications during pregnancy or childbirth will claim the lives of 760 mothers in every 100,000 births. Inadequate access to medical care, qualified staff and birthing facilities means many women give birth alone, in remote and unsafe conditions with little recourse to assistance when things go wrong. Thanks to the partnership between Caritas Goma, the Knights of the Southern Cross and Caritas Australia – this situation is changing for hundreds of women in Minova and neighbouring areas of Kalehe, Bunyakiri and Kirotshe.

In June 2014, Caritas Australia staff visited the maternity block as part of a trip to monitor the impact of our programs throughout the Eastern Congo. We met with hospital staff, toured the facility, and had the opportunity to interview women who have benefited from the construction of the maternity ward at Minova General Hospital.

We learnt that the dedicated maternity block has helped to greatly reduced the rate of maternal mortality in the area because women now have the opportunity to seek early assistance for complications and reside at the hospital for up to a month before they're due to give birth. While Minova General Hospital has recorded between 150 and 200 births per month as having complications, just three women have died during childbirth at the hospital in the past 12 months. In two of these cases, the women arrived at the hospital too late in their pregnancy to receive life-saving care.

With a capacity for 25 beds (there are 14 beds at present), the Minova General Hospital maternity ward has become a home away from home for hundreds of women who would otherwise have little choice but to risk their lives giving birth. In fact the ward has been so successful that many women are travelling great distances from outside Minova to seek the safety and support that comes from living in such close proximity to qualified staff and well-equipped birthing and medical facilities. The centre also provides a safe place to for many women to seek assistance and following their experience of sexual and gender-based violence; through education and counselling these women can learn to reclaim their dignity and become community ambassadors for peace and women's rights.

As the success of the maternity ward attracts more and more women to seek qualified care and support during pregnancy and childbirth, the Minova General Hospital will face new challenges. Bedding, equipment, and uninterrupted electricity are already at a premium, and poor nutrition can be a serious problem for many women during their stay. But with support from Caritas Goma, Caritas Australia and the Knights of the Southern Cross, we are confident we can support mothers in the region and rebuild lives in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.



MEET ADOLPHINE

Adolphine (34 years old) was eight months pregnant when she started to bleed. This is her seventeenth pregnancy and, without medical attention, her doctor says this childbirth would have been too much for her body to bear.

Adolphine lives with her husband and 12 children (4 have passed away) in a village 4km from the city of Minova. Though her husband has shown little concern for the serious risks to her health, and that of her unborn child, Adolphine now has access to the support of five doctors and 30 nurses at the Minova General Hospital.

With a bed in the hospital's newly-constructed maternity ward, and easy access to medical staff and treatment for the duration of her pregnancy, Adolphine and her baby now have the chance to live.



ABOVE: Woman resting on an old mattress in the maternity ward.

BELOW: Women resting in bed in the maternity ward.

The maternity ward has capacity for 25 beds - there are currently 14 in the ward. Demand for the maternity ward has become so great that two or three women sometimes need to share a bed.





LEFT: Hospital staff - Jose Nabnunga and Dr. Michele Kahule - meet outside the maternity ward built in partnership with Caritas Goma and the Knights of the Southern Cross.

BELOW: Women drying their washing on the hospital lawns. Most women will stay at the maternity ward for a month before they give birth. Living on the hospital site can ensure that women have access to life-saving care in case of complications.

THANK YOU!

