

## Dh4 can save a life

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With the visit to Dubai of Alice Sia Koroma, First Lady of Sierra Leone to coincide with the recent International Day of the African Child, the war-torn country and its child population are finally getting the exposure they deserve in the UAE. Alice Sia Koroma, whose husband Ernest Bai Koroma was elected president last November, is known in her homeland as the 'Mother of the Nation.' Her mission while she was in Dubai was to raise awareness and funds for her country's children. United Nations Office for Project Services regional director, Phil Lewis, told us, 'UNOPS provide services for construction focusing on hospitals in particular and micro-financing. The final Sierra Leone aid network we managed to catch up with was the 'All As One' organization. Almost everything at the orphanage - from clothes, bedding, educational materials and food - is paid for or acquired through donations.



The war left 15 per cent of the children in Sierra Leone orphaned



A huge population of Sierra Leone depends on aid provided by charity organizations



Alice Sia Koroma with students of a school in Dubai

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As one in four children does not live beyond five years and one in six pregnant women dies, human life is in a dire state in Sierra Leone. The recent visit by its First Lady to Dubai has given the war-torn country the much-needed focus from the region. **David Light** speaks to NGOs working to rebuild Sierra Leone

WITH THE visit to Dubai of Alice Sia Koroma, First Lady of Sierra Leone to coincide with the recent International Day of the African Child, the war-torn country and its child population are finally getting the exposure they deserve in the UAE.

Alice Sia Koroma, whose husband Ernest Bai Koroma was elected president last November, is known in her homeland as the "Mother of the Nation." Her mission while she was in Dubai was to raise awareness and funds for her country's children.

Sierra Leone is recovering from a brutal 10-year civil war, which ended in 2002 but left the country with no infrastructure to support the needs of the 15 per cent of children left orphaned. The African State is ranked bottom of 177 countries in the UN Human Development Index and has one of the highest infant mortality rates in the world: one in four children does not live beyond five years and one in six pregnant women dies. These frightening statistics mean that the children, which do survive are often left to fend for themselves in a country where food, shelter and comfort are scarce.

It is therefore with some considerable joy

that *City Times* can shed light on just a few of the organisations in the Emirates trying to make a difference in Sierra Leone. Firstly we spoke to Hani M. Al Zubaidi the Regional Director of LIFE, a Non-Governmental Organisation established in the US and based in the UAE. "We have been going since 1992 and are one of the largest NGOs in the region," Al Zubaidi said. "We started working in Sierra Leone in 1994 by giving food and aid. By 2004 we opened an orphanage to help with healthcare and education as well as shelter. There are many handicapped children in Sierra Leone, which we pride ourselves on taking care of by providing the care and attention they need. We take in as many children as we can and the number is set to increase as we are building a new orphanage right now. We have a great connection with the International Humanitarian City here and through them we have a great relationship with the government of



Alice Sia Koroma visited Dubai recently to raise funds for war-ravaged nation

Sierra Leone and Sia Koroma." LIFE's new orphanage hopes to open its doors by the end of the year.

The next organisation we spoke to making a difference in Sierra Leone was the United Nations

Office for Project Services (UNOPS). UNOPS regional director Phil Lewis told us, "UNOPS provide services for construction focusing on hospitals in particular and micro-financing. We have given over 5000 families

enough money to start up small businesses so we focus on sustainability. We don't just do things and leave. As we're part of the UN we are based everywhere. Sierra Leone is a huge part of our operations and the First Lady visiting Dubai can only raise its profile." UNOPS try to use local labour and businesses where possible when building new facilities in various countries, quite literally helping people help themselves.

The final Sierra Leone aid network we managed to catch up with was the "All As One" organisation. All As One was established in 1997 as an international charity registered in Sierra Leone. It has a non-profit office in the UAE licensed through Dubai International Humanitarian City. The Country Director Matthew Morgan-Jones told us what All As One was all about. "The United Nations has estimated that there are over 500,000 children in Sierra Leone that do not have access to basic education. As part of its vision, and in co-ordination with the government of Sierra Leone, AAO plans to build a new Children's Centre and schools that will provide accommodation for 150 children and

school facilities for over 300. The All As One Schools will allow orphaned, abandoned and destitute children the opportunity of an education. The schools will serve not only the children in AAO's care, but also those in the local community." All As One already have an orphanage in the middle of Freetown, Sierra Leone. Mrs Koroma, herself a former nurse, recently visited the AAO orphanage in the slums of the city to meet the 43 children currently being cared for at the home. Almost everything at the orphanage - from clothes, bedding, educational materials and food - is paid for or acquired through donations. "We really need as much help as possible. We are all volunteers here in Dubai and keep running costs to a minimum so all money that we do receive goes to the children," Morgan-Jones said.

It may seem like too big a problem to deal with but these groups are trying in an area that many would have given up in. You too can make a difference by donating to LIFE and All As One. ■

To donate to life visit [www.lifeusa.org](http://www.lifeusa.org) and for All As One, [www.aadubai.org](http://www.aadubai.org). All As One calculates that four dirhams a day will save a child's life in Sierra Leone so please give generously.

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