



## A HELPING HAND FOUNDATION

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### A HELPING HAND FOUNDATION VISITING SRI LANKA JANUARY 2019

January 2019 chairman Piet Houtenbos and his wife Lydia van der Kieft visited our aid workers in Sri Lanka. Some of them we already know more than 25 years: Sunethra Weerasinghe, who conducts homes for disabled in Colombo, the Buddhist monks Pannindriya and Saranankara and Sisters of Carmel Congregation.

Our journey also took us past projects of the Dutch foundation Havonos (Heart for Northeast Sri Lanka), with which we cooperate since one year. Therefor we travelled to the North, the area between Jaffna, Puttalam en Trincomalee. Almost ten years ago here ended a bloody civil war. For reconstruction of this emaciated land a lot has to be done. Not only building infrastructure and homes, but also better education, social guidance and mental support.



This report describes the founding's of this journey and shows progress made with all projects.

#### ***A Helping Hand Foundation (SEHH)***

*Foundation's aim is relief to the poorest, with proper use of earthly resource's, without distinction of ethnic origin, religion or gender. SEHH supports small-scale education projects and disabled care in two countries: Sri Lanka and Sierra Leone (West Africa). The foundation attaches interest to a personal relations and friendship between Board members, sponsors and beneficiaries. That's why the foundation motto is 'from heart to heart, from hand to hand'.*

*SEHH is an organisation of volunteers. We do not conduct large advertising campaigns, but obtain sympathy by word of mouth. Incomes flows from yearly donations from our sponsors, contributions from other Dutch relief organisations and from self-organised activities, like 'Dinner for charity'. The foundation makes very little cost. By doing so, every Euro received is spent to the projects. As average we offer yearly €30.000,- to relief in both countries.*

*Every year the foundation makes arrangements about expenses with our local partners. They keep us informed about progress and results by sending reports and pictures. Besides that, Board members them self visit our aid partners regularly. They travel entirely on their own costs.*

### **Care for disabled in Colombo**

Already more than 25 years Sunethra Weerasinghe takes care for physically and mentally handicapped. In her homes Suhada Home (Kotte) and Sasara (Angoda) are staying about 75 residents. However needy people are nominated for care by official institutions, Government only pays a minimal compensation. People around, as private donors and small companies, contribute daily cost as food, clothes and electricity. For big expenses Sunethra appeals on our foundation.

So last year she could replace leaking roofs and out-dated electricity wiring in Sasara with our support. Also she bought more sustainable mattresses. From a private gift we brought she purchased a new washing machine immediately. The old one was just broken.



*The reception at Sasara*



*The new washing machine*

During our visit Sunethra showed more improvements to be done. Among them the construction of a vegetable garden, in which residents can grow their food. We admire Sunethra's approach: everyone in the homes helps in housekeeping and in care for each other. We only see happy and lively people here!

### **Active Buddhist monks**

Pannindriya Thero conducts the Dhamma Gavesi Meditation Centre in Colombo, a spiritual centre for education, research and meditative workshops. He was the first relation in Sri Lanka of our former chairman Hein Vink. Every year the foundation provides a budget for his social work. This time he had bought a fridge for a hospital, specialised in fighting against dengue. In Sri Lanka still a dangerous disease, caused by an infected mosquito bite.

Saranankara Thero works in a remote village in mountainous area, North of Kandy. He started some years ago with noting and now there is a small, simple temple and school. Yearly we give him support for his 'SEHH-Study Fund', from which he provides school material for poor children and for organising school trips. Last year he got budget for purchasing three computers. He already knows how to deal with computers and teaches the children. During our visit, just on Poya Day, we could open his 'Computer Training Centre' in a festive way. A jump into the 21<sup>st</sup> century!





*Opening Training Centre*



*Saranankara explains Holland calendar received*

### **Sisters of Carmel Congregation**

Carmel Sisters perform their tasks on care from different locations (convents), spread across the country. They teach at schools in poor areas, conduct homes for needy girls and they pick up elderly, who are left behind. One of them is Sr. Therese Ranee, attached to a rural school near Puttalam. When she was appointed, some years ago, the school was declining. The ambitious sister set up a program to turn the tide. She not only wanted to improve school performances, but also to lift up the community with poor day labours.

SEHH supports her with budget for extra lessons, food at school, furniture and school materials. We saw the sister at work: she teaches self-made lessons in high speed, she introduced a reward system to stimulate pupils and at the end of the lessons she meditates with them. Very special! We requested Sr. Therese Ranee to write down her 'education method' as an example for others.



*Sr. Therese Ranee*



*New school building*



*Meditation*

Last year we made her possible constructing a separate school building, including computer room and small kitchen. As sponsors we opened the building ceremonially. Of course Sr. Therese Ranee suggested us other plans for implementing her program, such as the construction of a basketball court. In the meantime number of pupils is increasing and school perspective is growing. Our expenses here are well spent!

We also paid a visit to other well-known Sisters of Carmel Congregation. Three of them, Sisters Lucrece (Vavuniya), Theresilda (Murunkan) and Wilma (Thalaiyadi/Elephantpass) work in small convents in the North, where social problems are still big. Sr. Wilma just started in a village, where tracks of tsunami and war are still visible. She told: rich people left for fear of repetition and the poor remained. She wants, just as Sr. Therese Ranee, teach extra lessons, almost free of cost, because most parents cannot pay. So, money from outside is needed...



*Tsunami monument with 40 victims*



*Damage still visible*



*Provincial House: handover clothing*

Finally we went to the Provincial House in Colombo, the main location of Carmel Congregation. There we met Sister Gnanadarhini, Bursar of the organisation. We talked with her about the idea of fundraising in own country, for financing their social work. After all, Sri Lanka has become more prosperous last years. So, there should be a greater potential of donors among people and companies. We pointed her on a special program, developed by the Dutch charity organisation Wild Geese and free available on their website. This program, appropriately named 'Change the Game', teaches local aid workers, as Carmel Congregation, how to raise money in own country. We noticed, the Sister still had to get used at the idea.

Anyway, we could offer her a suitcase with hand made children's clothing from Miss Annie van Dijk, resident of Maasland.

### **The diligent workers of OMI**

As well known, North of Sri Lanka suffered from years of civil war and still there is a lot of poverty and deprivation. One of the organisations, which are working on the reconstruction with and between the needy people, is OMI, the abbreviation of 'Oblates of Mary Immaculate'. The 'Fathers' are mainly active in the countryside. They work on community building, they teach children and adults, they support small farmers and they exploit agricultural land themselves.

After an introduction by Jaffna Province Superior Very Rev. Fr. Edwin we visited a series of initiatives, which have been realised last years with support of our Dutch partner organisation Havonos and Dutch charity 'Wild Geese'. The projects are still in progress:

- The 'Youth Education Centre' near Jaffna: three years ago constructed for further education to (unemployed) youngsters. Against small compensation they get lessons in technical skills, computer use and English. Also drama and music are practised, part of trauma recovery. The interest of young people is big. At the moment extra classrooms are constructed, with donations from Havonos and SEHH. The building was nearly completed and... 'within the budget, Director Father Philip proudly states.





*With Fathers Philip and Seeger*



*Classrooms nearly completed*

- *Learn/work farm in Iyakachchi (near Elephant pass):* a real farm with animals and cultivation of crops. Cows deliver milk; pigs continue to grow and become fat; chickens lay eggs and are slaughtered. Women from the surrounding, often widows, work and learn how to set up a small business at home. At the same time there are workshops and courses. Children get extra lessons, soon also on computer. This education costs money, but OMI-Father Avalin ensures, after one year the farm will make sufficient money to cover the cost of the whole centre.



*Learn/work farm in Iyakachchi: a showpiece of the Oblates*



*Cowshed, with in the middle Fr. Avalin*



*School children playing after their evening classes*



- *'Sieco-Centre' in Mullikulam*: a community home, called after the founders Sieni and Cor Schouten of Havonos. The centre is located tens of kilometres away from cities. It only can be reached through miserable sand roads, full of pits. The building offers the village people room for courses, workshops, gatherings and special events. OMI-Father Harance is managing the centre. He also cultivates about 5 acres of land with just planted palm and banana trees. His ambition is to grow vegetables. Therefore he needs an irrigation system. The just deepened well is already there.

Last year Havonos and SEHH bought a Pick up for this centre, which is used for transporting crops from farmers to the city (where they get better yield) and for bringing children to school in rainy season. In cases of urgency it also operates as ambulance. The only motorised transport in the surrounding!



*Sieco-Centre in operation: education to young ladies*



*New Pick up*



*Well and already cultivated land behind Centre*



*Fr. Harance shows desired vegetable: eggplant*

- *Pre-school in Mulankavil*: the existing school is out-dated and too small. OMI has a plan for a new building. Havonos and SEHH are willing to contribute and they will ask the Dutch Wild Geese to share. OMI-Father Seeger mentioned they also want to cultivate their surrounding land of 20 acres, now still partly fallow. He is thinking at creating a 'model farm', which can be of significance for surrounding farmers. This ambition seems to us quite a job, for which you need a lot of knowledge and skills. Perhaps Government can facilitate such ambitious initiative?

- *A new OMI-location* in a village with for us unpronounceable name Thrachanarmaruthamadhu (so we say T-madhu): the just appointed Father Vasanthan has plans for constructing classrooms, including computer room and living room for teacher. As he told, population in this area will grow. People remain and Government is intending to build housing schemes by providing land and budget to people who want to settle. Reconstruction of countryside. OMI notices the need for community building and extra education. New plans for T-madhu will arrive!
- *Girls Home 'St Anna' in Mankulam*: under inspiring guidance of Sister Chrisani (Good Shepherd) about 40 girls are residing here. Earlier they were most orphans, nowadays children from families with severe social problems. With help from Havonos and SEHH the kitchen and sanitary were renewed. During our visit we could admire the results. The home is neatly again!



*New showers with well and water tank*



*Sr. Chrishani shows the innovations*



De trip along the OMI-centres provided a nice overview of the progress reached last years. But there are sorrows too. Up to now certainly not all disadvantaged people are involved, active participation could be better and should be stimulated further. Besides this social issue, people suffer from failed harvest, due to extreme droughts and sudden abundant rainfall. Here you really notice effects of climate change. There is a need of specific measures on water management to meet these challenges. An opportunity for experiments on OMI-farms?

The efforts and enthusiasm of OMI-Fathers is as great as ever.... and work inspiring. Certainly worthwhile to continue our support!

### **Caritas Sri Lanka**

This time we also became acquainted with another aid organisation, namely Caritas, the executive arm of Roman Catholic Church. Their focus lies on fighting against poverty and bringing back human dignity, without ethnic distinction and religious origin. They operate on all fields of life, for instance from economic existence to health care. We saw them busy with education to adults and production of prostheses for handicapped. So, in assistance to needy it's a professional player of size. Of course Caritas Father Anton gave us some suggestions for relief....





*Fr. Anton (Caritas) explains the need for prostheses*



*Fr. Avalin, Annemieke and Marjolein from Rockids and Fr Seger discuss computer education in Iyakachchi*

### **Rockids**

Our contact with Caritas came through Marjolein Meijer, during some years active in North with her Dutch organisation Rockids. As ICT-specialist she enthusiastically promotes computer education in backward areas. Now she is involved in a computer project in Iyakachchi. Soon the construction of a special classroom will start, with financial contribution of Havonos, SEHH and Wild Geese. In the meantime Marjolein organises the program 'Train the ICT-trainers': Sri Lankan teachers get a professional training in The Netherlands.

At the same time Rockids has an eye for more coherent aid programs and from that point of view they consider Caritas and OMI as appropriate partners. SEHH, Havonos and Rockids will discuss the opportunities of more cooperation.

### **Look back**

The journey was valuable. For our relations it's always stimulating showing their progress and exploring new perspectives. After all those visits we always return home with a huge bag filled with plans and good intentions. We will discuss everything in our SEHH Board and we will consult our partner Havonos. Anyway we can move forward another year!

Lydia van der Kieft  
Piet Houtenbos

***Thanks to all sponsors who made this work possible!***

February 2019

More information on our Foundation SEHH you find on [www.sehh.nl](http://www.sehh.nl) (with English homepage); and for Foundation Havonos see [www.havonos.nl](http://www.havonos.nl)