25 YEARS OF HUMANITARIAN AID IN 25 PHOTOS
With the contribution of

popolare
Banca Etica
This publication contains twenty-five images that epitomise our history. Twenty-five photographs representing twenty-five years of activity. Twenty-five moments to remember, to understand what we have done and how we got here. And to say thank you to the thousands of people who over this quarter of a century have helped INTERSOS to grow, and to never feel complacent. Our raison d’être has not changed in any way: we are here to help, to be on the frontline, to reach out ever further. Aside from the celebrations, anniversaries are often a good opportunity to sit back and take stock: to look back at our history, see what we have achieved, single out new goals. All the more so in our case, seeing that the twenty-fifth anniversary of INTERSOS’s foundation coincides with the drafting of a new strategic plan, which will show the way forward for an organisation seeking to consolidate its role as Italy’s primary humanitarian organisation engaged in emergency situations.

Since 1992 INTERSOS has grown a lot, be it in terms of capability and resources. In 25 years we have come to the help of populations in nearly 50 countries, developing and completing hundreds of projects in collaboration with all those who have chosen to work with us. In 2016 alone, INTERSOS worked in 17 countries, helping more than 2 million beneficiaries in close to 150 projects having a global value of 50 million euros. Over time, the national and international scenarios we have worked in have not been easy, and the number of serious emergencies seems to have grown exponentially. Domestic and international conflicts that condemn whole populations to immense suffering, deprived of their fundamental rights and the bare essentials, and often at risk of death; then
there is the ever greater risk of climate change and natural disasters. The growing impact of conflicts and the effects of climate change are creating migratory flows that have a devastating effect not only on the populations affected but also on neighbouring host regions and countries, which are often poor and are faced by the same difficulties. Serious and urgent humanitarian needs all over the world are growing more quickly than our ability to respond to these needs, thus leaving millions of people without help, at a time when they most need it. Improving humanitarian aid to populations affected by disasters, and particularly by armed conflicts, is perhaps the biggest challenge that has to be tackled nowadays by humanitarian organisations. The space in which actors are able to move and operate in compliance with the principles of humanity, independence, neutrality and impartiality, the so-called ‘humanitarian space’, is narrowing for non-government organisations. We must come up with new forms of intervention, in which new actors operate in compliance with humanitarian principles while continuing to provide direct aid and remain in close contact with local populations, finding solutions that make it possible to operate in high-risk settings. INTERSOS’s degree of specialisation and experience can make the difference in this respect. To do this, the first thing we have to do is invest in ourselves, never feeling satisfied with the results we have achieved. This means investing more in our ability to analyse and understand needs, and thus to provide rapid and effective responses.

In coming years we shall continue to work and intensify our vocation as an organisation, which has solid roots in Italy, trying to do our best in terms of values and competences, and at the same time seeking an increasingly important international role, and continuing the decentralisation process, with the creation of offices in areas that are strategic and practical with regard to our activities. We will do all we can to raise our ability to provide rapid and effective responses to emergencies, and to raise our presence in crisis-hit areas: war zones, humanitarian crises, natural disasters, increasing our ability to see the danger signs, respond, access and take up a position. We will work alongside local, national and international actors already present in crisis-hit areas, and will play an ever more active role in global dialogue on humani-
tarian issues. We will make significant investments in innovation, adapting operating strategies and reviewing our way of supporting field activities, in order to make raise the quality of assistance to beneficiaries.

Last but not least, we want to strengthen our ties and our dialogue with the people who support us. We at INTERSOS intend to identify and take up new global challenges, which require a fresh and effective humanitarian response. We want to communicate what we are doing, sharing with those who follow and support us the obstacles and even the mistakes we sometimes inevitably make. We are aware that in such an unstable environment there are few certainties. There is one certainty however, and that is the knowledge that without the dedication and engagement of those who work with us and those who follow and support us, it would be very difficult indeed to achieve the ambitious results that we have set ourselves.
A STORY ABOUT HUMANITY

by NINO SERGI, Honorary President

The photographs in this book tell a story, filled with emotions, tears, outstretched arms, handshakes, rescues, shelter and protection. Images taken from real life, from the daily travails of a humanitarian organisation such as INTERSOS. A story full of meetings with a suffering humanity, aching in body and spirit, lost, desperately searching for some sort of security with which to begin a new life: women, mothers, children, elderly people, people of every race and colour expressing the humanity we are all a part of, always with the desire to pick themselves up, begin again, rebuild their lives.

A story full of hopes, tenderness, compassion, sharing. But also inevitable risks, doubts and dangers. And compromises, when seeking forms of dialogue, with anyone willing to talk, perhaps even with those whose hands are still bloodied, in order to obtain a truce, freedom of movement, to rescue, protect, save and, if possible, build trust, seek new dialogue and make the first teetering but crucial steps towards peace. INTERSOS was founded as the result of a tidal wave of emotions, caused by the heart-rending images of hunger and death coming from Somalia in 1991 and 1992. Civil war, drought, famine: a lethal mix that brought about destruction, thousands of emaciated souls trudging for miles and miles in search of food. There was death, hatred and egotism, but also selflessness, and self-sacrifice; the priorities were to feed, care for, protect and educate; and to take everybody home, with dignity, to the villages and towns they had been forced to evacuate. The same priorities would shape our actions over the decades.

INTERSOS’s mission is to provide humanitarian aid. In these twenty-five years, from the Somalian crisis to the conflicts in the former
Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Angola, Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, Chad, Lebanon, South Sudan, Mali, Yemen, Syria, Nigeria and elsewhere, we have been guided by a fundamental principle: the humanitarian imperative, the absolute duty to “be there”, to rescue, to bring help. The principle of HUMANITY has guided our choices, and we have highlighted this in our Charter of Values with this phrase written by Terence: “Homo sum, nihil humani a me alienum puto – I am a human being, no human being is a stranger to me”.

We did not learn about humanitarian principles by reading about them: we acquired them first hand, day after day, with our actions. NeutralitY: no barriers, willing to seek dialogue with all parties in order to reach those most in need, despite being aware of the rights and wrongs of the case; imparTialitY: bringing help to everyone in danger, without distinction or limitation; independence: refusing to undergo impositions, being free to make choices in keeping with humanitarian principles. These are not sacred or sacrosanct words, they are simply a steady guide for our actions, helping us to avoid mistakes.

We have also sought to view crises and humanitarian emergencies as an interruption of a process of coexistence and development. Even though such growth may be fragile, it still needs to be recovered and supported in order to see a return to normal life and normal human relations. As humanitarian operators, we too are called upon to make our contribution to this return to normality: by rebuilding all that is essential in order to begin again, or by attempting to mend the strands of dialogue and peace-making, as we did in Kosovo, mediating between Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs, thanks to the trust built up by bringing aid to both sides, impartially, in the worst moments of the conflict.

Humanitarian emergencies caused by armed conflicts, social and political uprisings, oppression or persecution have risen exponentially in this quarter of a century, affecting millions of people, forced to live in fear and to flee, taking shelter in safe havens. We have seen them with our own eyes. And we have often realised that the political will to prevent, contain or settle disputes before they turn into devastating crises has shrunk. States appear to be hesitant, and positions taken are those of self-interest rather than a willingness to actually solve problems. Sometimes military
actions are defined as “humanitarian” in nature, but they often cover up the shortcomings of the political arena and the lack of a long-term vision. The inability to govern complex situations and the inevitability of migratory flows is sometimes concealed too, seeking to ensure security through stopgap measures designed to maintain tight control and put up barriers.

The photographs published here take us through this history, and highlights some of the issues. The path taken by INTERSOS over these first twenty-five years in more than thirty countries, sharing the suffering and the hopes, observing heart-breaking conflicts but also people’s will to overcome them; extreme disdain for human life and desire for annihilation, but also examples of profound humanity; blind and destructive policies, but also forward-looking, peace-oriented policies. Everywhere we have gone, it has all been about a meeting with humankind: men and women, children, elderly and disabled people. We have shaken a lot of hands. The mere fact of being there is a sort of communication that expresses hope. We have given a lot, in terms of aid and protection, with ever greater commitment and professionalism. At the same time, we have also received a lot, and reinforced, with not a little belief, the humanitarian values by which INTERSOS has been inspired over these years.
We arrived in Somalia in 1992, in the devastated capital of Mogadiscio, full of homeless people fleeing from war and hunger, then further inland, in Jowhar, in the region of Middle Shabelle, to support and run the regional hospital, the only real hospital structure in an area serving over 250,000 people. This was INTERSOS’s first mission.
Our ties with Jowhar and Middle Shabelle have never been severed. The hospital, now run by Somalian doctors, nurses and ancillary staff, has always been able to rely on our support, and we consider ourselves a part of this community, united in peacetime moments of social, cultural and economic reconstruction as well as in moments of difficulty and suffering.
Sandro Pocaterra, head of mission, Giuseppe Valenti and Augusto Lombardi, surgeons, in a photograph taken with INTERSOS General Secretary Nino Sergi, in 1996, soon after their release after 64 days of being held captive in Chechenia. One of the most dramatic moments in our history.
Beyond the emergency. In Kosovo, after the war, bombings and destruction of 1999: helping with the return to normality and peace in the country, attempting to save and restore the country’s Ottoman-Islamic and Serbian-Orthodox artistic heritage, and promoting cultural dialogue between the Albanian and Serbian communities. Between 2002 and 2010 we supported a training programme, the restoration/reconstruction of three mosques built in the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries and the preservation and protection of 13th-15th century frescoes in Orthodox churches. A treasure of immense value returned to the community with the resumption of dialogue.
Handing out food in Albania. The 1990s were a terrible decade for the Balkans. Not just a war in the former Yugoslavia, with INTERSOS on the frontline in Bosnia Herzegovina since 1994, but also a profound economic and social crisis. After its liberation from the dictatorship, Albania found itself on the verge of collapse.
After having met and helped many mutilated victims, in 1996 we commenced direct de-mining activities, working closely with experts, and actively supported the campaign for the prohibition of anti-personnel land mines. In the former Yugoslavia the clean-up effort was enormous, just as in Angola, Afghanistan and Iraq. In ten years of activity INTERSOS’s Mine Action Unit restored land, homes, factories and entire villages to local communities, with the formation of dozens of local mine-clearers in each country.
One of the 60 wells dug in the region of Wadi Sakih, Darfur, to provide access to water in an area suffering from a dramatic water crisis. Arriving in Sudan at the height of the conflict, in 2004, INTERSOS worked without interruption over the following 10 years.
Between 2002 and 2007 we took part in one of the UN’s largest repatriation programmes, with the return home of more than 5.2 million refugees from Pakistan to Afghanistan. INTERSOS helped over half a million people in reception camps in Pakistan, and subsequently with their return and the reconstruction of houses, schools and water infrastructures in Afghanistan.
INTERSOS’s mission in Afghanistan began in October 2001 in the province of Faryab, providing basic assistance and rebuilding primary and secondary schools for 6,500 girls. Work on reconstruction and support given to the organisations of civil society expanded into 14 provinces. Today we continue to be on the frontline, helping the population, especially in the province of Kandahar, providing primary medical care and developing protection programmes for women and children.
Since 2006, every Wednesday and Thursday at 11 a.m., a room on the top floor of the Haematology Department of Policlinico Umberto I hospital in Rome becomes the headquarters of the Italy-Iraq telemedicine programme, set up and supported by INTERSOS. This entails the sharing of clinical records, laboratory tests, statistics and medical protocols to help some Iraqi paediatric haematology clinics to improve and perfect the quality of treatment.
INTERSOS has worked in the Democratic Republic of Congo since 2010, in the north-east of the country, in areas particularly affected by violence, race discrimination, kidnapping and abuse of the civilian population. Women are the principal victims of indiscriminate violence perpetrated by armed groups. We help the victims of violence and abuse, providing them with protection, psychological support and food, building schools and children’s centres, training and helping teachers to carry on with their work.
INTERSOS has operated in the Philippines since the Haiyan typhoon emergency in 2013, when we handed out essentials, tents, emergency shelters, blankets, water tanks and hygiene kits at Cebu and Tacloban. In subsequent years we have focused our activities in the Tanauan area, where the typhoon destroyed 98% of the area’s homes and infrastructures, making 20,000 people homeless, working to hasten the recovery.
A training session on first aid techniques in Haiti, where we arrived following the 2010 earthquake. The speed and efficacy of the response to natural emergencies is fundamental for the INTERSOS mission.
The first cargo of Italian aid that landed in Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal, after the earthquake of 25 April 2015. A drama in which INTERSOS consolidated its ability to provide an immediate response to an emergency, coordinating aid arriving from Italy in concert with the Italian Foreign Affairs Ministry and taking essentials and basic medical care to villages in the mountains that had been cut off due to the earthquake.
Lebanon, 2006. We began our actions in the “land of the cedar” by bringing help to the population in the south of the country during and after the conflict with Israel, and supporting communities in the dialogue and peace-making process after the initial emergency.
We returned to Lebanon in 2013 to tackle the humanitarian crisis caused by the conflict in Syria. Today INTERSOS is recognised as one of the main actors in the sphere of protection, given in particular to Syrian and Lebanese women and children, providing psychosocial support, legal aid and informal education. We provide Syrian refugees with housing and medical care, drinking water supplies and sanitary services, and promote activities to further the integration process in local communities.
Syrian refugees in Jordan. Just 15% of Syrians registered in the country live in official camps, while more than 500,000 refugees live here and there in urban and rural areas, mostly in poverty, with few economic resources and little chance of work, limited access to basic services and dramatic living and hygiene conditions.
Berkasov, Serbia, autumn of 2015. With a family of Syrian refugees at the border with Croatia. Since then INTERSOS has been in the frontline helping and protecting Syrian refugees in Europe, from the Balkan flow in the autumn of 2015 to the closure of the borders and the agreement between the European Union and Turkey, which since 2016 has blocked tens of thousands of refugees and kept them in limbo, in the outskirts of Belgrade or in the camps in the north and on the Greek islands.
In December 2011 INTERSOS opened the A28 centre in Rome. This is a shelter where over 4,000 foreign minors travelling alone and in transit in Italy have found a welcoming environment, a clean bed for the night and the support of our cultural mediators. This experience is ongoing, and is now being expanded with INTERSOS24, the new centre for primary care and 24h reception, which opened in October 2017 in the Torre Spaccata district, in the south-west suburbs of the capital.
Faced by the drama of the earthquake that struck central Italy in 2016, we felt it our duty to intervene, with a project offering psychosocial support, mainly to children. This enabled us to have a constant presence by the side of the affected population, cooperating with local and national institutions to seek a return to what might be approaching a state of normality. In the photo a moment during the photography workshops and the rediscovery of local roots, involving roofless youngsters in San Benedetto del Tronto.
A school in a camp of displaced persons in South Sudan. Even in situations where war, violence and instability are the norm, education must remain a priority, alongside meeting primary needs. INTERSOS opened its first operating base in South Sudan in 2006, and today is one of the main humanitarian organisations operating in the country.
Children eating sticks of just-received therapeutic food during an initiative at Kaga-Bandoro in the Central African Republic. The bags of Plumpy’nut are a fundamental way of treating malnutrition. INTERSOS has also coordinated monitoring and malnutrition treatment programmes in Nigeria, Cameroon, South Sudan, Somalia and Yemen.
A mobile clinic at work near Mosul in Iraq. During and after the battle for the control of the city, which began in October 2016, we were in the front line in providing a humanitarian response to help the fleeing population and the victims of fighting, showing solidarity and providing primary medical care, psychosocial support for the victims of trauma and violence, legal aid, and education in emergency settings.
A medical examination in the governorate of Aden, in Yemen. Since the outbreak of the civil war in 2015, INTERSOS is the only Italian humanitarian organisation that has remained in the country. The constant growth of frontline medical activity is a crucial strategic choice, something we consider to be a priority, and are investing in everywhere.
Banki, Nigeria. Bringing help by helicopter to victims of the conflict fuelled by armed group Boko Haram, victims that still cannot be reached via land, and 100% dependent on outside humanitarian aid.

>>> Augmented reality contents. Download the free app Aurasma for your smartphone and access special contents.
25 YEARS OF HUMANITARIAN AID IN 25 PHOTOS

1. Italy
2. Somalia
3. Rwanda
4. Burundi
5. Bosnia and Herzegovina
6. Kenya
7. Mozambique
8. Albania
9. Chechnya
10. Angola
11. Kosovo
12. Macedonia
13. Montenegro
14. Serbia
15. Poland
16. Honduras
17. Nicaragua
18. Eritrea
19. Afghanistan
20. Pakistan
21. Irak
22. Sudan
23. Chad
24. Sri Lanka
25. India
26. Liberia
27. Indonesia
28. Haiti
29. Bangladesh
30. Mauritania
31. Mali
32. South Sudan
33. Uganda
34. Philippines
35. Yemen
36. Lebanon
37. Myanmar
38. Jordan
39. Democratic Republic of Congo
40. Nigeria
41. Cameroun
42. Central African Republic
43. Greece
www.intersos.org