

# FIGHTING BLINDNESS FOR THIRTY-FIVE YEARS

The Eye Care Foundation has been working consistently towards eliminating avoidable blindness in various parts of Asia and Africa for thirty-five years. ECF works together with local ophthalmic professionals to provide basic eye care. It also contributes to the funding of the construction of eye hospitals, eye clinics and optics centres and covers the purchase of necessary equipment and instruments. However, ECF's ultimate goal lies in enabling local organisations to independently provide good quality eye care. ECF supports projects in cooperation with local governments, agencies and other aid organisations to realise a solid local ophthalmic infrastructure.

Over the past thirty-five years, hundreds of ECF volunteers have worked hard and achieved a great deal. In the Himalayas, the Mekong Delta and Africa, approximately half a million people have received cataract surgery. ECF's ophthalmologists have also treated other eye conditions that, if left untreated, could lead to blindness and impaired vision.<sup>4</sup>

In countries where, twenty to thirty years ago, only a handful of ophthalmologists were treating patients, there are now many more professionals at work. The ophthalmic infra-

structure has been vastly improved and has become more sustainable.

ECF has also invested in awareness and prevention and has organised countless awareness campaigns for the prevention of vitamin A deficiencies, the promotion of healthy diets, good hygiene and, increasingly important, regular screening of schoolchildren for myopia (nearsightedness).

Nevertheless, there is still a lot of work to do. The world population continues to grow, leading to a growing number of elderly people with cataracts. Also, an ever increasing percentage of the young population worldwide suffers from myopia due to spending too much time indoors, peering at digital screens. Despite the epidemic developing at a faster pace than ECF and others can keep up with, four out of five people who are blind or have impaired vision can be helped with surgery or glasses.

Thanks to our generous donors, many of whom give long-term financial support to ECF's activities, the Eye Care Foundation plans to continue working together with other aid organisations and local authorities to further reduce avoidable blindness worldwide.



# OFF TO A FLYING START

## THE OOGKAMP HIMALAYA FOUNDATION



▲ Board of Directors and Lions Group



▲ Peter de Boer visiting the King of Nepal

It all started with a crumpled piece of paper that the Dutch ophthalmologist Gerard Smith showed to his friend Peter de Boer in early 1984 at a Lions Club gathering. On the note was a scribbled reminder from Nepalese ophthalmologist, Yanta Mani Pradhan about the eye camp in Nepal. Smith had said that he would be willing to participate in an eye camp in the Himalayas to perform free surgeries. The South-Kennemerland Lions Cub (in the Netherlands), which was then still in its early years, was immediately enthusiastic about the idea.<sup>5</sup>

Later that year, after sufficient funds were raised through selling cups and saucers at the annual market in Heemstede (the Netherlands), the Lions Club booked three plane tickets to Kathmandu for ophthalmologist Gerard Smith, filmmaker Bas Anselms and photographer Hans Donkersgoed. Together, they embarked on their first eye camp expedition to Nepal.

During that trip, almost two-hundred-and-fifty cataract surgeries were performed. The success provided evidence for a repeat

# LIBELLE BHOJPUR 1985



16

▲ Team Eye Camp Himalaya, Bhojpur 1985 ▲ Patient walking to an eye camp, Bhojpur 1985  
▲ On the way to an eye camp, Bhojpur 1985 ▲ In the waiting hall during an eye camp, Bhojpur 1985

## Godfather

Rob van Vuure, the editor-in-chief at Libelle, unwittingly became a godfather to ECF. He gave the first push that started the ball rolling from occasional improvised eye camps to an organisation with long-term goals and responsibilities. A good three decades later, hundreds of thousands of people in Asia and Africa who were previously blind, have had their sight restored thanks to a kind gesture made thirty-five years ago. "Every year Libelle editors cast around for a charity to support together with our readers. The eye camps were a wonderful new initiative and therefore we wanted to help."

mission. Peter de Boer plucked up the courage and went to the offices of Libelle magazine, where his friend Rob van Vuure was editor-in-chief, hoping to convince him to run an article about the eye camp. Peter explains, "I walked into that tall VNU (United Dutch Publishers) office building in Haarlem wanting to raise ten thousand guilders through an article about the eye camps in Nepal and hoping that the readers might feel motivated to make a donation.<sup>6</sup> Rob liked the story and called in a number of editors in charge of the 'Puzzle Marathon', an annual event through which Libelle raised money for a pre-determined charity. Luckily for us, that year they were looking to support one of the smaller, lesser known charities. This is how we became the beneficiary of the 1985 Libelle Puzzle Marathon.<sup>7</sup> When I asked how much money the marathon would raise, Rob told me that it would be around one million guilders. It was a shock; I felt like I was falling down all six stories of the VNU building."

The Foundation Oogkamp Himalaya, which literally translates to the Eye Camp Himalaya Foundation, was then founded so that they could participate officially in the Libelle Puzzle Marathon. The first board of directors consisted of, among others, Gerard Smith, Peter de Boer, Leendert Parlevliet, Aad Hemelaar, Bert van Maaren, Jan Last, and Irene Nabben.<sup>8</sup>



▲ Building team of the Himalaya Eye Hospital: Deepak Lama, Peter De Boer, and Herman Grimminck  
 ▲ At the Mechi Eye Hospital

6 VNU later acquired AC Nielsen and recombined the two businesses in 2001. Retrieved June 14, 2019 from The Nielsen Company (Version 2019): <https://www.nielsen.com/nl/nl/>  
 7 Voogt, I. Women in the Media: A sociological analysis of gender advertisements in a Dutch women's magazine. Braga: Universidade do Minho, 2012. and Retrieved June 14, 2019 from Sanoma Media Netherlands (Version 2019): <https://www.libelle.nl/>  
 8 Maaren, van, B. En na 28 jaar ontwikkelingshulp zijn we geen stap verder. Amsterdam: Trouw, 2012.



From day one it was a joint Nepalese-Dutch enterprise with ophthalmologists from both countries sharing their expertise. Thanks to the Libelle million, Oogkamp Himalaya was able to broaden its focus significantly. In the beginning, all the attention was focused on the eye camps in remote areas, but the extra money allowed the foundation to also start building a sustainable ophthalmic infrastructure with training courses, acquisition of expertise and hospital capacity.

Despite the fact that the spotlight was mainly on building a sustainable infrastructure, help from Dutch physicians was certainly needed in those first few years. In 1984 there were only a handful of ophthalmologists in Nepal and even a few years later only around thirty.<sup>9</sup> It was not possible for them to organise the additional eye camps on top of their daily duties. Foreign organisations stepped in to help and took over some of the areas. In the end, the Oogkamp Himalaya Foundation adopted the four least accessible and most sparsely populated provinces. The foundation decided early on that it was important that the aid be temporary and be aimed at establishing sustainable services. They wanted to help set things up and subsequently leave everything in the hands of local administrators. "It's important to know at which point to stop: to determine beforehand what results and progress you want to achieve," continues Peter. "After that, you can always set up other projects. It shouldn't end up as an endless stream of funds."

▲ Gerard Smith's suitcase from his first expedition  
 ▲ Gerard Smith performing surgery  
 ▲ Instrument carriers





## DUTCH VIP'S JOIN THE FIGHT

Within its first few years of existence, the foundation managed to motivate a number of prominent Dutch people to support the mobile eye camp initiative. They lent their names to the cause as members of a commission of recommendation. Among them were a television talk show host and journalist Mies Bouwman, former Minister of Foreign Affairs and former Secretary General of NATO Joseph Luns, the founder of Martinair Martin Schröder, the Nepalese honorary consul Dolf Noordijk, Professor at the Radboud Hospital A. Deutman, a former ABN AMRO board member Mr. R. Koole, and former Amsterdam mayor Wim Polak.

# "WE WORK WITH OTHER PEOPLE'S MONEY"

## WE SHOULD SHOW THEM WHAT WE DO WITH IT

In the late nineties Ruud Lapré, a Dutch university professor and partner at KPMG,<sup>10</sup> became the new chairman<sup>11</sup> of the Eye Care Himalaya Foundation (renamed from Oogkamp Himalaya Foundation in 1995).<sup>12</sup> This marked the start of a new phase for the organisation. "Previously, the board of directors had been formed more or less accidentally as a group of friends. I wanted to make things more professional: to interact less as friends and more as business partners. We now worked with other people's money and we needed to let them know what we were doing with it."

This also meant that some seemingly promising offers nonetheless had to be rejected. For example, an eye hospital was to be built in Mechi, in eastern Nepal. A start had already been made, in a rental building and, due to great success, we needed to move to a bigger building. "Sometimes wealthy families would offer grounds for free, but with the condition that a family member must be appointed as a director. Private and public money can certainly co-exist, but we refused these kind

of offers. We felt strongly about running an ethical operation."

Many other lessons were learned along the way. For instance, back in 1993 the foundation paid for the training of two ophthalmologists, with the intention that they would come to work at our new hospital in Pokhara in Nepal for a couple of years. Instead, they left to live and work in England. We talked to them and negotiated with them, but they never came back to us. Ever since then, we have worked with official contract arrangements that stipulate that doctors and nurses or other professionals who receive training funded by us, are required to work for us for a fixed number of years.

Throughout the 00's the realization grew among Eye Care Worldwide (renamed from Eye Care Himalaya Foundation in 2004) management board members that they could widen and strengthen their sphere of activities by working together with another organisation.<sup>13</sup>

9 Williams, L. Eradicating Blindness: Global Health Innovation from South Asia. Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore Pte, 2019.

10 The first treasuries of ECF all came from KPMG (Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler) an international accounting and advisory organization. Retrieved June 14, 2019 from KPMG (Version 2019): <https://home.kpmg/xx/en/home.html>

11 Retrieved June 14, 2019 from Ruud Lapré (Version 2019): <http://www.ruud-lapre.nl/over-ruud-lapre.html>

12 Broers, M. ECF Year report 2008. Amsterdam: Eye Care Foundation, 2008. Arp, P., Goedhart, S. a.o. Met het oog op Nepal. Tien jaar stichting oogkamp Himalaya. Haarlem: Rombach, 1994. (With a view to Nepal. Ten years Himalaya eye camp foundation.)

13 Eye Care Himalaya (Oogzorg Himalaya) changes name into Eye Care World Wide (Oogzorg Wereldwijd, OWW). Retrieved June 14, 2019 from (Dutch) Open Nieuws Bank: <http://www.opennieuwsbank.nl/bericht/2004/08/28/M005-oogzorg-himalaya-wijzig-haar-naam-in-oogzorg-were.html>



▲ Fundraising booth, 1990



▲ Leendert Parlevliet at the first office of the Eye Care Himalaya in Heemstede



▲ Board of directors and members of the team



▲ New Board of Directors, around 1990



▲ Opening of the Himalaya Eye Hospital by the king, 1993



▲ Opening of the Himalaya Eye Hospital by the king, 1993



▲ Donor visit to Pokhara, 1993



▲ Opening of the Himalaya Eye Hospital by the king, 1993



▲ Opening of the Himalaya Eye Hospital by the king, 1993



▲ Staff Himalaya Eye Hospital, 1995



▲ Donor visit to Pokhara, 1993

MED team traveling on the Mekong River



# EXPEDITIONS OF MEKONG EYE DOCTORS



▲ MED team on the way to an eye camp  
▲ MED eye screening

Mekong Eye Doctors was founded in 1993 and was largely initiated by biochemist Eric van Agtmaal.<sup>14</sup> The first board of directors consisted of Eric van Agtmaal, Rob Spel and Hans van Gelderen among others. Van Agtmaal, who was married to an ophthalmologist, had carried out research in the Mekong Delta on the effects that a combination of eye drops and a good diet had on young people. He saw so many untreated eye conditions that, once back in the Netherlands, he organised a relief effort for Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and a small area of southern China.

Every year, Mekong Eye Doctors (MED) sent a number of expeditions with Dutch ophthalmologists and nurses to the region. They always worked together with local hospitals: they exchanged knowledge, gave additional training to ophthalmologists and donated equipment. MED attached great importance to integrating ophthalmic care in the region's general health care system. Consequently discussions about adding eye clinics to existing hospitals quickly followed. MED also provided preventive care such as distributing vitamin A in schools to children who were suffering from 'dry eyes' due to vitamin A deficiency.

MED began as an amateur organisation, but became professional as time went by through increased emphasis on education, prevention,



▲ Henk Dragt in a conversation with Buddhist monks in Cambodia

infrastructure and sustainability. Eye camps were a good start, but building structural facilities with good accommodation, modern instruments and trained specialists became increasingly important. Working towards sustainable, integrated ophthalmic eye care was the ultimate objective.

Ten years after the founding of Mekong Eye Doctors, volunteers and employees looked back with satisfaction at a multitude of successful initiatives. But their ambitions stretched further. In 2007 it became clear to Johan Wolters, who was at that time a member of the MED board of directors, that a merger between one or more sister organisations would be a logical next step. It would mean shared costs, increased knowledge and experience and more money for long-running projects. Merger talks with the Eye Care Worldwide foundation were expeditious, and as a result, in 2008 the Eye Care Foundation became a reality.

## OPERATING WITH ONE HAND BEHIND YOUR BACK

Some of the most remarkable aspects that Dutch ophthalmologist Henk Dragt remembers of the first few expeditions in Vietnam, are the small teams, the old-fashioned techniques and fast work pace.<sup>15</sup> “We wanted to catch up on the huge cataract backlog. We were able to do two hundred surgeries a day and everything had to be done fast, which made sense, considering the large number of patients who were blind. But we weren't happy with the quality and that gave rise to discussion. Because the Vietnamese government was also insisting on modernization in eye care, MED switched to more modern surgery techniques. It takes more effort and requires a higher level of training from the ophthalmologist, but in the end the result is vastly better.”

A journalist once wrote ‘Dragt operates with his hands tied behind his back’. “That was my intention! I supervised, gave some pointers and explanations and the local ophthalmologist carried out the actual surgery. Nowadays, we only go out there to lend support and show new techniques. The local doctors are much better at performing surgeries in the eye camps than we are.”



▲ Patient of Mekong Eye Doctors in South Vietnam

## Walking six hours for an eye exam

Peter de Wolff from Almere (the Netherlands) was the treasurer for Mekong Eye Doctors from 1999 to 2005. "In those days I traveled to Cambodia multiple times to visit projects in Kratie, Stung Treng and Mondul Kiri. In late 2007, I travelled with ophthalmologist Heng Sokhan and his ophthalmic assistants from the hospital in Kratie to the Health Post in the village of Chang Krang. The villagers had been told in advance that the eye team would be there for one day only to perform eye exams, make diagnoses (cataracts, eye injuries or other conditions) and, if necessary, refer patients to the provincial hospital in Kratie. People came from far and wide. I remember a farmer who was almost completely blind from cataracts. He had to walk with his family for six hours to reach the Health Post. Doctor Sokhan referred him to the hospital in Kratie for surgery. MED also financed his stay in the hospital since he could not afford the cost."

# A GIFT FROM HEAVEN

MED Provincial Eye Clinic  
in Cambodia



In the late 1990s, (at the end of the tenure of founder Eric van Agtmaal and some volunteers) Mekong Eye Doctors was restructured. Rob Egger in particular, and his fellow board members, were deeply committed to guiding Mekong Eye Doctors Foundation through this difficult period. Ophthalmologists Marius den Boon and Hedwig Kemme took the lead in rebuilding the network of volunteers. In 1999, Yvonne Reifler and Violet Speek were hired to manage the office, do the administration and supervise projects. "Hardly any documentation was left behind; we had to reinvent things as we went along," Yvonne Reifler says. The pair attended an IAPB congress in Vietnam where NGOs<sup>16</sup> and aid organisations conferred with delegates from countries in the region. "That was quite strange. Representatives from Vietnam and Laos avoided us. Earlier internal problems had caused challenges in Asia but we were completely unaware. Luckily we met the national eye care coordinator from Cambodia. She was a big help. Together with her we were able to create a new network." Little by little they gained more insight. "I had just earned my master's degree in public health and believed that 'if someone is hungry you should give them a fishing rod - not give them fish' – continues Reifler. "Eye camps where the entire medical staff and all the equipment were flown in seemed inefficient to me. Still, sometimes we needed to start

with sending Dutch volunteers, while supporting local knowledge and skills so that local ophthalmologists could eventually perform the outreach duties themselves."

Reifler also kept track of income and expenditures. "We were less successful in raising funds than in finding donors. Our approach was to seek funding for specific projects. When we couldn't find the capital, the project was put on hold. Basically there was always a shortage of money. MED was even broke at one point; due to the aftermath of the organisational break-up bankruptcy was a real likelihood. But right at that moment we received notice from a solicitor's office: a deceased donor had bequeathed two-hundred-thousand guilders to MED. Truly a gift from heaven! Without that legacy MED would have ceased to exist around the turn of the century".

Mekong Eye Doctors followed the guidelines developed by the IAPB in collaboration with the WHO in 1998 on how the issue of blindness could be addressed. Reifler also made her further observation<sup>17</sup>: "We were very adept at setting up projects. We always strived for sustainability and eventual transference to local partners, while keeping our funders well informed".

<sup>16</sup> Non-governmental organizations are usually non-profit and sometimes international organizations independent of governments and international governmental organizations that are active in humanitarian, educational, health care, public policy, social, human rights, environmental, and other areas to effect changes according to their objectives.

<sup>17</sup> Boon, van, M. Year report 2004. Stichting Mekong Eye Doctors. Amstelveen: MED, 2005.

Local health post eye screening in Cambodia



Cees vd Windt with the locals in Nepal

# FROM EYE CAMP TO NETWORK

The activities of Eye Care Worldwide and Mekong Eye Doctors strongly appealed to many people. The notion of helping someone to literally look forward to a better future, as the result of a relatively small donation inspired a lot of support. The volunteers in the field felt the same way. Helping at an eye camp for a couple of days or weeks and treating a wide range of eye diseases (long eradicated in the Netherlands), was extremely rewarding.

During the initial stages of each project, doctors and nurses travelled from the Netherlands to do the in-country work. This was the case in regions where doctors were in short supply or where the level of education was so poor that providing training and refresher courses for doctors and nurses needed to be, and was, prioritised.

Eye camps provided an ideal opportunity to quickly and intensively transfer a great deal of knowledge and expertise. As soon as local staff and volunteers had the capabilities to do

the work themselves, limitations were placed on the costly venture of flying in medical professionals from the Netherlands. Besides, the local teams, with their experience and working methods, were better prepared to see and treat an increasing number of patients. Dutch ophthalmologists would only slow them down. Once a project reached the 'second' stage, the Dutch contribution mostly consisted of teaching new techniques, providing long distance guidance and funding support.

The role of the aid organisations was quickly moving from leading service delivery to supporting system strengthening. Strong working relationships were created with regional and international partners. Agreements were reached for setting up networks to continue, even after sponsors eventually withdrew their support. Lines of communication were opened between hospitals, local authorities and other organisations. The goal was affordable eye care for everyone.

# THE MERGER

## THE BEGINNING OF THE EYE CARE FOUNDATION

In the summer of 2007, Eye Care Worldwide and Mekong Eye Doctors agreed to move into a joint office and to work towards an official merger in 2008.<sup>18,19</sup> Rob van Rooijen became the new chairman, Martien Broers the new director and Yvonne Reifler was appointed the new head of projects.<sup>20</sup>

“The two organisations complemented each other extremely well,” says Yvonne Reifler, currently Projects Director at ECF. “Eye Care Worldwide was more professional when it came to fundraising and had a lot more money to spend. On the other hand, MED was more structured and cohesive. And we could finally invest in offices. These were much

needed to negotiate with the local bureaucracies. Our local colleagues knew exactly what needed to be done to keep up the pace. They were always responsible for liaising with the authorities and supplying them with the necessary reports.”

At the same time, in order to ensure the two foundations merged to establish the strongest possible new organisation, overseas project work was put on hold during this period.

For Eye Care Worldwide this meant taking a critical look at the many small aid projects in various countries in Asia and Africa. A number of small projects were finalised as soon as

### TREASURER DURING THE MERGER

Accountant Fer Wijstma had been fascinated by the mountains since his twenties. He loved trekking through the Alps, but he was blown away by the Himalayas. “I joined the donors’ trip to Nepal organised by Oogkamp Himalaya and I went to see the mountains. Getting to know the country was an extra bonus. That was when I discovered what the foundation really did. I watched a grandmother seeing her grandchild for the first time after she had undergone cataract surgery. It was an incredibly emotional experience.”

In 2003, Fer Wijstma was already retired when he received a phone call from the Oogkamp Himalaya’s chairman, Ruud Lapré. “Sadly, Doeke Duurmsa had unexpectedly died and the organisation needed a new treasurer. That is how I ended up on the board and stayed until the end of 2016.”

18 Retrieved June 14, 2019 from De Dikke Blauwe: <https://www.dedikkeblauwe.nl/news/fusie-mekong-eye-doctors-en-oogzorg-wereldwijd>

19 Retrieved June 14, 2019 from De Volkskrant: <https://www.volkskrant.nl/economie/instellingen-ooghulp-slaan-handen-ineen~b326b9b2>

20 Broers, M. ECF Year report 2008. Amsterdam: Eye Care Foundation, 2008. Geels M., Reiffler Y., Broers, M. Ogenblik Magazine. Amstelveen: MED/ECF, 2007 and 2008. (yearly 13.000 copies).



possible to allow the focus to shift to a limited number of projects for which there were high expectations in terms of improvements in eye care. Mekong Eye Doctors had already begun taking similar steps some time earlier. After the merger they were therefore left with a manageable collection of countries and projects to focus on.

Both organisations were active in Vietnam: Eye Care Worldwide had a project in the north while MED worked mostly in the south. In order to ensure that the project in the isolated north would not be neglected, another foreign organisation was eventually found to take the project under its wing.

Despite the favourable starting conditions and the structured management approach during the merger, the Eye Care Foundation still faced some challenges. The merger in 2008 coincided with the ever deepening global financial crisis and drastic emergency measures implemented by banks and governments worldwide. It was not until 2013 that the worst seemed to be over.

The number of donors and sponsors had grown steadily before 2005, but then stagnated in 2008.<sup>21</sup> A strong effort was therefore made to generate income, which proved to be an uphill endeavour. The present-day donor differs from the donor of some twenty years ago. A professional fundraising agency was hired to address the challenges and managed to turn the tide. Additionally, in the project countries, fundraising opportunities arose in

## RECEIPTS

Bas van Leeuwen started working at Eye Care Worldwide a few months before the two foundations merged to become ECF. "There were big differences between the two organisations. Mekong Eye Doctors had each and every receipt sent to the Netherlands. That system of financial accountability was very time consuming. At Eye Care Worldwide, however, the organisation in Nepal controlled its own budget, made its own annual financial report that was subject to audit. We focused only on the broader lines."

That too had its drawbacks. The office in the Netherlands transferred funds to the reserve account every year, but never specified what it was to be used for. "At a certain moment there was a large sum of money parked on an account that wasn't being used for anything. That poses risks. Just think about the financial crisis when banks went bankrupt and savings disappeared. At the same time, it was a testament to the trustworthiness of our employees in Nepal."

the shape of donors and sponsors, allowing the projects to prepare for more independence in the long term. After the merger and consolidation of the newly formed organisation, ECF was able to broaden its focus from Asia to establish projects in Africa. While the projects in Africa are still in their early stages and remain relatively limited, ECF intends for the scope of those projects to increase in the coming years in order to address the high need for eye health.

# CURRENT PATHS

A completely new organisation was created in 2008 with the programme-oriented approach of MED on the one hand and the fundraising expertise of Eye Care Worldwide on the other. “Currently ECF finds itself continuing the process of professionalization,” says Bas van Leeuwen, the former head of finance at the foundation.<sup>22</sup>

In the past few years, the nature of the work at the Eye Care Foundation has changed. Some countries where ECF is active have been developing into Middle Income Countries (MIC’s). For a long time the focus of ECF’s activities in Vietnam, for example, was on catching up on the backlog of cataract surgeries and on building a dependable ophthalmic infrastructure with enough doctors, nurses, (outpatient) clinics and regional basic health care centres. That network is now practically fully developed.

Because of the enormous back-log of cataract surgeries, the number of countries adopted

by ECF is growing. Apart from its key projects, ECF has begun providing support to various smaller initiatives with which the foundation plans to be involved for a long period of time. Thus, more income will be needed in the coming years. “The funds will need to grow,” van Leeuwen says with conviction. “Finding donors requires an active approach. But we always succeed in giving a clear picture of where the donations go.”

ECF has examined its operational processes internally and where possible relegated them to the ECF offices in Cambodia, Laos, Nepal, Vietnam and Tanzania (2019).<sup>23</sup> This was possible because of cooperation for procedures between all the offices: “ECF is a single organisation, active in multiple countries, which means that there must be mutual trust, not solely one-way traffic from Amsterdam,” states van Leeuwen. All ECF’s offices now play an important role in policy shaping and their influence is growing.

<sup>22</sup> Retrieved June 14, 2019 from De Dikke Blauwe: <https://www.dedikkeblauwe.nl/news/fusie-mekong-eye-doctors-en-oogzorg-wereldwijd>

<sup>23</sup> Retrieved June 14, 2019 from Eye Care Foundation (ECF): <https://eyecarefoundation.nl>



▲ Ho Chi Minh City Eye Hospital project meeting - Vietnam, 2011



# ALWAYS LOOKING FOR A CONNECTION

The solution ECF offers for the big issue of prevention and cure of avoidable blindness and visual impairment is strong in all its simplicity: you can restore someone's sight with surgery or a pair of prescription glasses. "This appeals to our private donors, who have often experienced themselves what it's like to have poor vision. Donors tend to seek a personal connection with the charities they support," says Maaïke van Veen, who has been in charge of fundraising and donor recruitment at ECF for more than five years. "Once you have experienced how well eye care is organised in the Netherlands, you understand the importance of providing primary and specialised eye care to patients worldwide."

Surgery or spectacles form a cost-effective solution and a very strong incentive, not just for the roughly 30,000 private donors, but also for foundations, companies and service clubs.<sup>24</sup> At the Eye Care Foundation, we have always chosen to maintain a long-term and personal relationship with our donors. Meanwhile, the donors are naturally changing along with the organisation. There have been big changes over the past 35 years. According to Maaïke van Veen, "One change is that for generations, people in the Netherlands supported causes out of a strong sense of

engagement. This still goes for the older generation, who remain actively involved and committed donors for a long time. Nowadays, the younger generation takes a different approach. They also support charities; many even, but do so for a shorter period of time. They are less likely to make a long-term commitment. The loyalty of the younger generations works differently. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but it does require a different communications approach. A more digital approach, for example."

Despite changes in modes of communication and tools, ECF's strong yet simple story is the reason why people donate money to the projects. In the end, fundraising is all about bringing donors and their recipients together as efficiently and directly as possible.

## Training

ECF heavily invests in training optometrists: professionals with skills in providing spectacle prescriptions. "You can find spectacle shops everywhere, but the glasses you buy there can be completely unsuitable," continues Maaïke. Professional school screenings are necessary to prevent entire generations of children having to guess what the teacher is writing on the blackboard. For these activities donor funding is paramount.

Besides the private donors there is also a growing corporate market. There have always been relief funds that give financial support on a project-to-project basis. In a number of countries where ECF is active, there are local units of international companies that are doing very well. They also want to invest in this form of aid. “Giving back to the country whose hospitality you enjoy: the concept has taken root in Vietnam. Locally operating multinationals have shown interest. The feeling of wanting to give back is growing stronger,” – says Maaïke.

### Priceless newsletters

Finding new donors while also retaining existing ones is a time-consuming job. Many people want to contribute when they are affected by an issue and feel emotionally connected. For this reason, we work with

digital and printed newsletters. Including patient stories and major news of the foundation, the newsletter proves to be a very lucrative fundraising tool. We not only inform many donors about the progress of current projects, but also raise funds. The printed newsletter always includes an acceptgiro (a common method of payment by bank transfer in the Netherlands) and the digital - a donate button.<sup>25</sup>

### Events

Additionally, the Eye Care Foundation organises many events throughout the year. “One very special event is ‘Een lens voor een mens’ (A lens for a person).<sup>26</sup> This event is held at ophthalmic departments in hospitals and in the waiting rooms of ophthalmologists,” says Margreet Geels, Event Manager at ECF. “During this event, we give a presentation about the foundation’s activities to people who have personally experienced how limiting impaired vision or blindness can be”. The Netherlands has countless organisations that support charities. Many of these organisations have sponsored ECF events. “Another bonus we sometimes get is Airmiles, which lower our travel costs. It makes organising talks in Asia and Africa quite affordable”.

Other activities that motivate people to donate include organising public talks or exhibitions at private companies, institutions, hospitals, member clubs, and schools. “Whenever we want to start a new project, we often organise public talks about it. Sometimes, the talks are supported by a side event. For example, Anke de Jong, a ceramic artist



▲ Donor trip to Cambodia, 2017

<sup>25</sup> The Acceptgiro's (bank giros) are a widely-accepted method of payment in the Netherlands and has been used by businesses and domestic users for decades. Retrieved June 14, 2019 from Acceptgiro: <https://www.acceptgiro.nl>

<sup>26</sup> Retrieved June 14, 2019 from The Eye hospital in Rotterdam: <https://www.oogziekenhuis.nl/nieuws/oogbussen-steunen-het-werk-van-eye-care-foundation.html>

and the wife of one of our medical advisors, often supports us by co-hosting her personal art exhibition where eyes are the main source of her inspiration. Part of the proceeds from the sale of Anke's artworks go to the Eye Care Foundation".

Also, service clubs such as Lions and Rotary regularly link their events to support ECF. "For example, there are golf tournaments where the teams play to support a good cause. The proceeds of the day's lottery will go to the charity chosen by the club members. We also have events of a smaller scale: a grandfather and grandson cycling to Berlin together and donating their sponsor money to ECF. Every little bit helps."

One recurring event for ECF is the Dam-tot-Damloop,<sup>27</sup> a well-known marathon from the Dam square in Amsterdam to the city of Zaandam. "In 2018 we participated for the 13th time; we were part of the event from the very first time that charities were allowed to join the sponsored run. Every year between 50 and 110 runners collect money for ECF. Some of them manage to collect up to one thousand euros," continues Margeet. Sometimes Dutch celebrities join the team to generate extra publicity. There was a runner who is blind who has participated twice. He now runs the Dam-tot-Damloop with his own team - Running blind.

## Donors' trips

"The Eye Care Foundation's income depends heavily on activities and events and donor contacts," continues Margreet Geels. She has also organised and guided the donor trips for years. "The past few years we organised one trip per year, but now we want to double that number. We travel to one of our project countries with eight to twelve donors to visit our projects and of course some of the country's attractions. The trips are always very intensive and last for approximately seventeen days." The participants finance their own trip and also donate a certain amount to our projects that they visit.

"What makes a donors' trip so special is that you get a much more intimate look at the country than an average tourist. We visit the local health posts in the villages, so the donors can observe their daily routine. All this happens in close cooperation with our local representatives, who know like no other where and how everything happens." Every time Margreet Geels witnesses how much the donors appreciate the project visits. "It is deeply moving to watch someone undergo surgery and being able to see again afterwards." These trips have a big impact: the participants are motivated to continue supporting ECF and to tell others about the foundation.

<sup>27</sup> Dutch VIP runner Mr. Beau van Erven Dorens raised funds for ECF at the Dam to Dam Run. Amsterdams Stadsblad Echo. Sportieve bekende Nederlanders in actie. Amsterdam, September 2015. Retrieved June 14, 2019 from Damloop: <https://www.damloop.nl>

# NY RECEPTION 2019

40



▲ Guests viewing the anniversary exposition



▲ Speech by the Nepalese Consul in Amsterdam, Casper F. De Stoppelaar



▲ Guests at the event



▲ Guests chatting



▲ Speech by Thijs van Praag, chairman of ECF



▲ Maaïke van Veen and Bouke Walstra



▲ Gerard Smith and Ton Lefeber



▲ Hedwig Kemme, Ton Lefeber and guests chatting



▲ Speech by Thijs van Praag, chairman of ECF

# MILESTONES

Besides the financial support from donors, ECF (and its predecessors) were also helped by other initiatives that generated more income or increased name recognition or physical aid. Following is a selection of heart-warming support.

## HANS VAN DONKERGOED AS A PIONEER

Hans van Donkergoed documented the first eye camp organised by Gerard Smith in 1984.<sup>28</sup> The photographs were intended to show the donors, who had made the expedition possible, what their money was being used for. The impressive images were subsequently used to raise more funds for a second expedition. Peter de Boer showed up at the offices of Libelle magazine with a couple of slides made by van Donkergoed, hoping to convince the editors to write a nice article on a Dutch ophthalmologist in Nepal. That led to the editors' decision to select Foundation Oogkamp Himalaya as the beneficiary of the next puzzle marathon's proceeds. In preparation for that event, Libelle reporter Yvette Schaap and photographer Hans Donkergraaf travelled to Bohjpur in Nepal in 1985, location of one of the eye camps.<sup>29</sup>

## LIBELLE PUZZLE MARATHON

After being chosen by Libelle as charity of the year for the puzzle marathon in 1985, Oogkamp Himalaya's activities took flight.

Editor Yvette Schaap travelled to the Bohjpur eye camp in 1985. She was deeply impressed by the country, the large numbers of people who were blind and the work that was carried out in a makeshift operating theatre. Her very personal articles inspired tens of thousands of people to join the six-week puzzle marathon and stick extra stamps on the weekly post-cards containing the solutions to the puzzles. A few years later, Flemish sister magazine Flair sent reporter Katrijn Joris to the eye camp in Damauli, Nepal. Her coverage too generated extra money for the foundation.

## NEPAL OGENGALA NOORDWIJK 1986

An extraordinary event that took place in Oogkamp Himalaya's early years was the culinary evening event organised by Dutch Rotary Noordwijk and surroundings.<sup>30</sup> This so-named Nepal Ogengala (Eye Gala) raised around 70,000 euros. In between the various activities on the evening's programme, attendees could talk to the board members and members of the commission of recommendation. Dr. Dolf Noorddijk was a commission member and had been honorary

<sup>28</sup> Visus magazine is published by The Optometrists Association Netherlands (OVN). Gerard Smith founder of the Eye Care Foundation. Visus, December 2014.

<sup>29</sup> Voogt, I. Women in the Media: A sociological analysis of gender advertisements in a Dutch women's magazine. Braga: Universidade do Minho, 2012. and Retrieved June 14, 2019 from Sanoma Media Netherlands (Version 2019): <https://www.libelle.nl/>

<sup>30</sup> Retrieved June 14, 2019 from Rotary Club Noordwijk (Netherlands): <https://www.rotary.nl/noordwijk>

consul-general for Nepal for years. Then there were Dutchmen Martin Schröder<sup>31</sup>, founder of Martinair (Airlines), Joseph Luns<sup>32</sup>, a former Secretary General of NATO and former minister and last but not least, Dutch TV-host Mies Bouwman<sup>33</sup>.

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## PRIX D'HUMANITÉ 1987

In 1987 the Lions Club Zandvoort (the Netherlands) decided to award the annual Prix d'Humanité to Foundation Oogkamp Himalaya.<sup>34</sup> During a festive evening in May, the award along with a sum of money was presented to Dr. Yanthe Mani Pradhan, honorary member of the foundation, who had travelled from Nepal to the Netherlands especially for the occasion.

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## RAYMOND HAVERLAG'S DOCUMENTARIES

Dutch filmmaker Raymond Haverlag, (who sadly died in 2002), meant a great deal to the Foundation Oogkamp Himalaya.<sup>35</sup> He made two documentaries featuring the organisation's activities when its focus was still limited to Nepal. Together with reporter Anita Matheij, Haverlag was present at an eye camp in Damauli in 1988. When it was broadcast on television it earned the foundation widespread recognition resulting in a significant increase in the number of donors and substantial sponsorship funds. In 1992

Haverlag once again travelled with the foundation's ophthalmologists, this time to eye camps in the high-altitude village of Chame and in Khude, which involved multiple days hiking. This documentary on the work of the couple Nok and Anneke van Waveren (ophthalmologist and ophthalmic nurse) was also shown on television. The couple has always been invested in restoring people's sight and the two of them have helped with various eye camps. Both documentaries were shown at lectures and meetings for many years and gave donors great insight into how things were done at the eye camps.<sup>36</sup>

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## IN-HOUSE PHOTOGRAPHER PIETER GOEDHART

For the first fifteen years of the foundation's existence, photographer Pieter Goedhart from Heemstede was the in-house photographer. He photographed every official and memorable occasion. Goedhart worked mostly in black-and-white and invested a lot of emotion in his photographs. He travelled to Nepal three times to document the activities at the eye camps. In 1988 he was in Damauli and in 1992 at Chame and Khudi. On those occasions he produced beautiful colour photographs. They formed the basis for a number of successful sales expositions. He was also present when the king of Nepal opened the Himalaya Eye Hospital in Pokhara.<sup>37 38</sup> (Sadly Goedhart died in 2016.)

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31 Retrieved June 14, 2019 from Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin\\_Schr%C3%B6der\\_\(aviator\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Schr%C3%B6der_(aviator))

32 Wilsford, David, ed. Political leaders of contemporary Western Europe: a biographical dictionary (Greenwood, 1995) pp. 287-94.

33 Bouwman, M. Gewoon Mies. Amsterdam: Ghandi publishers, 2017.

34 Retrieved June 14, 2019 from Lions Club Zandvoort (Netherlands): <http://lionsclubzandvoort.nl/liza-bridge>

35 Eye Care Himalaya (Oogzorg Himalaya) changes name into Eye Care World Wide (Oogzorg Wereldwijd, OWW). Retrieved June 14, 2019 from (Dutch) Open Nieuws Bank: <http://www.opennieuwsbank.nl/bericht/2004/08/28/M005-oogzorg-himalaya-wijzigt-haar-naam-in-oogzorg-were.html>

36 Arp, P., Goedhart, S. a.o. Met het oog op Nepal. Tien jaar stichting oogkamp Himalaya. Haarlem: Rombach, 1994. (With a view to Nepal. Ten years Himalaya eye camp foundation.)

37 The eye hospital was officially opened on 1 March 1993 by H.R.H. King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev. Twenty-five years after this moment, the Himalaya Eye Hospital and ECF memorize this day together. (Deshsanchar march 2018) <https://eyecarefoundation.nl/assets/uploads/180301-Himalaya-Eye-Hospital.pdf>

38 Arp, P., Goedhart, S. a.o. Met het oog op Nepal. Tien jaar stichting oogkamp Himalaya. Haarlem: Rombach, 1994.

## ALWAYS IN THE NEWSPAPERS

Piet Arp, a Dutch journalist at the Haarlems Dagblad, a regional newspaper in Haarlem, travelled to Nepal a number of times for the newspapers of the GPD (Dutch Associated Press) to write about the foundation's activities.<sup>39</sup> From a distance, he had followed the ophthalmologists' first expedition to Jumla. His articles on the eye camps in Damauli, Chame and Khudi raised a lot of money that was needed to fund the construction of the hospital in Pokhara. Thousands of readers of the newspapers continued to support the foundation as permanent donors for many years afterwards. The articles were always accompanied by pictures taken by Eye Care Himalaya's in-house photographer Pieter Goedhart.

## TELEGRAAF: AN EARLY SUPPORTER OF MEKONG EYE DOCTORS

Mekong Eye Doctors received publicity from the start in 1993 when an article on the young foundation, written by Marianne Janssen, was printed in the Dutch newspaper de Telegraaf.<sup>40</sup> As a reporter for the newspaper, she had always put the spotlight on aid in low-income countries and had visited countless projects. In one of her first articles on MED, she wrote about a boy who was blind as a result of vitamin A deficiency. Overcoming vitamin A deficiency was a global issue that needed to be solved. Her first few articles raised 350,000 euros for the MED activities.

## SWIMMING EVENT FOR MED

In 1996 the Lions Club in Bergen (the Netherlands) organised a swimming event with the proceeds earmarked for Mekong Eye Doctors.<sup>41</sup> Approximately fifty swimming teams from private companies, hospitals, member clubs and groups of friends participated in the sponsored event. The local hospitals alone joined in with five teams. Every distance that a team swam was worth money. The sum raised by the event was impressive: approximately 80,000 euros.

## ALL-TERRAIN VEHICLES

Ophthalmologist Diederik Jansonius, from Deventer (the Netherlands) was the surgeon at the first eye camp in the inhospitable Chitral district in Pakistan.<sup>42</sup> He also performed the first ever cornea transplant in Djibouti. In addition, Jansonius organised multiple sponsor events for the foundation through the Deventer Daily (daily newspaper) and Wegener (nowadays named De Stentor). The foundation's first all-terrain vehicle in Nepal was paid for with money raised in Deventer. The newspaper also sent reporters to Nepal on a number of occasions. Homme Krol was one of those reporters. He accompanied the teams on two eye camp expeditions in Chame and Khudi, which took multiple days of hiking in the high mountains of the Himalaya's. The subsequent articles also led to many new and permanent donors. (Sadly, Dr Jansonius died in 2012.)

<sup>39</sup> The Dutch Stichting Pers Unie (SPU) was a Netherlands based news agency and is now part of the Wegener media company. Retrieved June 14, 2019 from Haarlems Dagblad: [https://www.haarlemsdagblad.nl/cnt/dmf20181213\\_20363280/in-achtbaan-naar-die-verre-maan](https://www.haarlemsdagblad.nl/cnt/dmf20181213_20363280/in-achtbaan-naar-die-verre-maan)

<sup>40</sup> In De Goede Doelen supplement of Magazine Plus, former Telegraaf journalist Marianne Janssen explained how simple and effective a cataract operation is for the patients of Eye Care Foundation. Magazine Plus - Goede Doelen. Amsterdam: Telegraaf, December 2014.

<sup>41</sup> Retrieved June 14, 2019 from Lions Club Bergen: <https://bergen.lions.nl>

<sup>42</sup> Retrieved June 14, 2019 from Oogartsen: <https://www.oogartsen.nl/oogartsen/nieuws/nieuws/51>

## THE MOTHER OF KARNALI

Ophthalmologist and mountaineer Margreet Hogeweg made annual, long-term expeditions to the high mountains in Karnali, Nepal, that were funded by the Dutch Lions 'Werkgroep Blinden' (working group for the blind) and Oogkamp Himalaya. In 2008, the Belgian TV-show 'Ladies First' made an extraordinary documentary about her work. After the turn of the century, the political unrest and the civil war in Nepal made the situation too dangerous to continue with the annual expeditions. Despite the unstable conditions, Hogeweg returned in 2008 to hike through her beloved mountains. That resulted in beautiful and moving images because the villagers in the thinly populated region had remembered her. Not only had she received a royal commendation from King Birendra of Nepal, in 'her mountains' she was still honoured as the Mother of Karnali. She saw people wearing glasses issued following cataract surgery working the land. "People I once operated on, who could now still see."

## ONLY IN DIRE NEED

Emergency relief!!!! That is how many projects in remote countries began. The Eye Care Foundation's aid quickly changed into structural care with the ultimate goal being to transfer the control to local parties. However, once in a while quick aid is still needed. For example in the aftermath of the 2015 earthquake, which ravaged a large part of our foundation's operating area in Nepal.

The region of the well-known Gurkha's was badly hit and reaching the residents was virtually impossible. However, thanks to the foundation's dense network of field workers and volunteers in Nepal, an assessment of the most urgent necessities was conducted fairly quickly. The staff of the Himalaya Eye Hospital donated a week's pay to create an immediate emergency relief fund. ECF decided to raise extra funds to cover emergency relief costs, so that emergency supplies could quickly be transported to their destination through their own local network. Besides funding emergency relief activities, money from the extra fundraiser was also invested in rebuilding in the region surrounding the epicentre of the earthquake. One year later it was once again possible to organise an eye camp in a makeshift camp to screen the local population for eye disorders. Rebuilding activities were still in full swing and the infrastructure was better than it had formerly been before the disaster.<sup>43</sup>

## FOURTH IN THE TOP FIFTY

Dutch daily newspaper Trouw ranked the Eye Care Foundation fourth in the top fifty most trustworthy charities.<sup>44</sup> Coming right after the merger, this was an undeniable demonstration of appreciation and trust in ECF. In the annual report, ECF notes that the vote of confidence was an extra motivation to work even harder to develop eye care infrastructure in low-income countries.

43 Chapagain, P., Ghimire, P., Thapa, R. School Atlas. Approved by the survey department/ Mapping Sub-Committee, Nepal. Katmandu: Ekta Books Distributors Pvt.Ltd., 2001: pp. 19, 43-46.

44 Retrieved June 14, 2019 from Trouw: <https://www.trouw.nl/tag/goede-doelen-top-50>



▲ ECF team and partners Tanzania



▲ School screening Vietnam, 2019



▲ ECF Trip Vietnam 2019



▲ ECF Trip Vietnam 2019



▲ ECF Team Vietnam



▲ ECF Team Cambodia



▲ ECF Team Cambodia



▲ ECF Team Laos



▲ ECF Team Nepal

# FUTURE PATHS

Where will the Eye Care Foundation be in fifteen years? Director Björn Stenvers would like to see a closer cooperation with international organisations such as WHO, IAPB and UNESCO.<sup>45</sup> One thing is certain: “In 2024 we will celebrate our 40th anniversary. ECF is doing well.”

Stenvers is fairly new to the position and looks at the organisation with a fresh eye. Unity and team spirit are key terms to him. “Not only in the office in the Netherlands, but in the entire organisation. I see ECF as one single team spread out between various hubs, offices, countries and continents. Everyone must be given the opportunity to develop and improve so that we will learn, develop and stay strong. It is also important that as little money as possible is spent on overhead (such as administrative costs) the donors’ money should primarily be used to finance the cause: the fight against avoidable blindness.”

He is looking forward to a wider approach. “At present many things are organised separately in different countries, but general support and special skills can be applied on a wider, regional scale. ECF activities should not be directed remotely from Amsterdam. Asia has been growing so strong in the last decades. In the future it would be wiser to organise flexibility so that activities can be done from any of our country’s hubs.”

How important are the numbers? “Working in primary eye care, there’s no avoiding it,” says Stenvers. “When fighting against avoidable blindness, you need to measure costs in order to report but also learn and adapt your strategies”.

“Great things have been achieved in primary eye care through Vision 2020 but, despite that, avoidable blindness is rapidly increasing worldwide particularly because of cataract. Today, in several Asian countries, so many doctors have been trained that there is a visible decline in the number of avoidable blindness cases. Zambia, however, has only a handful of doctors available to serve a population as large as that in the Netherlands. They still have a long way to go.”

“Within the time span of maybe a decade, the world has been severely affected by the epidemic of myopia. Among the main causes is the increased time we spend staring at our favorite small, brightly lit screens.” In China roughly sixty percent of children under the age of fourteen are already myopic. This can have serious consequences for their development and future opportunities. The myopia epidemic is spreading worldwide.”

ECF will continue working according to a demand-based as opposed to a supply-based approach. “For every project we make



▲ Daniel Willbard receives a Certificate of Appreciation during his visit to Amsterdam

a five-step plan, from the entrance to the exit stage. I think we should consider how we want to leave the local NGO behind once we find ourselves in the exit stage; how we can maintain a certain connection, like a commonwealth. In my view, no country has to be cut loose entirely." The times when policy was decided in the Netherlands to be implemented elsewhere, are behind us, according to Stenvers. "We need to scout for talent in the countries where we are active, people who can give our permanent staff new insights."

## GREAT RESULTS MORE WORK TO BE DONE

Thanks to the contributions of thousands of donors and sponsors, the Eye Care Foundation has achieved extraordinary results over the past thirty-five years. The figures up to and including 2018 paint a positive picture, but there is no denying that much more remains to be done.

One of the most important courses of action is the eradication of avoidable blindness through, among others, cataract surgery. Prevention is also actively promoted and that requires being deeply integrated in the community, which is why ECF seizes every opportunity to offer basic eye care training to village elders, spiritual leaders, groups of mothers, maternity nurses and midwives.

# THE FIGURES

FROM THE START UP UNTIL 2018 <sup>46</sup>

5,033,856

patients screened and diagnosed

426,984

cataract surgeries performed, mainly by local ophthalmologists

44,170

basic eye trainings provided

1,544

ophthalmic nurses trained

203

ophthalmologists trained

24

district eye care centers built

7

eye clinics constructed



**ECF**  
The European Blind Union is founded.



**ECF**  
August 28  
Oogkamp (Eye Camp) Himalaya founded by Gerard Smith.

**ECF**  
First province in Nepal adopted.

**WORLD:**  
January 28  
The American space shuttle Challenger explodes seconds after lift-off, killing its crew of seven.



**ECF**  
Lions Club Zandvoort decided to award the annual, important Prix d'Humanité to the Oogkamp Himalaya foundation.



**ECF**  
First 8.000 regular donors in the Netherlands.

**ECF**  
First five-year plan: work in four provinces, build a clinic, open an office in Kathmandu.

**WORLD:**  
November 9  
After separating East and West Germany for 28 years, the Berlin Wall falls.

**WORLD:**  
August 2  
Iraqi troops invade Kuwait, marking the beginning of the Gulf War.

**WORLD:**  
December 25  
British engineer and computer scientist, Sir Timothy Berners-Lee, perfects his invention; the World Wide Web.

**WORLD:**  
July 1  
The Warsaw Pact is officially dissolved at a meeting in Prague.  
December 26  
The Soviet Union is formally dissolved.



**ECF**  
April 22  
Mekong Eye Doctors founded by Eric van Agtmaal.

**ECF**  
First eye camps in Tibet and Sikkim (North India).



**ECF**  
September  
Opening of a clinic in Pursat Provincial Hospital in Cambodia (in collaboration with Doctors without Borders).

**ECF**  
Preventing and combating blindness in the Mekong region Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam.

**WORLD:**  
November 1  
The European Union is formally established when the Maastricht Treaty takes effect.

1984

**ECF**  
World Blind Union (WBU) is founded.

**ECF**  
March  
First NL-funded eye camp Jumla, Nepal.

**ECF**  
March  
First NL-funded eye camp Jumla, Nepal.

1985

**ECF**  
Campaign in Haarlem Daily Newspaper brings 230.000 guilders.



**ECF**  
Weekly Libelle magazine chooses Oogkamp Himalaya as a charity organization for the annual Puzzle Marathon.

1986

**WORLD:**  
April 26  
One of four nuclear reactors at Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant explodes, sending a cloud of radioactive fallout into the atmosphere, which affects large areas of Europe.

1987

**WORLD:**  
December 8  
President Reagan and Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, sign the first ever treaty to cut the size of their nuclear arsenals.

1988



**ECF**  
Opening of the field office in Kathmandu.

1989



**WORLD:**  
February 11  
Nelson Mandela is released from Victor Verster Prison after more than 27 years in prison.

1990

**ECF**  
Opening of the first District Eye Center in Jumla, Karnali.

1991



**WORLD:**  
April 5  
The Assembly of Bosnia

1992

**ECF**  
Telegraaf newspaper publishes an article about Mekong Eye Doctors.

1993

**ECF**  
March 1  
Opening of the Himalayan Eye Hospital in Pokhara by King Birendra

1994

**WORLD:**  
May 10  
Nelson Mandela becomes South Africa's first black president.

**ECF**  
Start training ophthalmic assistants at Himalaya Eye Hospital.

**ECF**  
New project in Vietnam in collaboration with Dien Bien Phu hospital in Ho Chi Minh city.

**WORLD:**  
October 5  
China performs a nuclear test, ending the worldwide de facto moratorium.

**ECF**  
2 new eye camps in two district hospitals in Laos.

**ECF**  
First Nepali hospital management.

**ECF**  
Opening of the District Eye Center Baglung by Dr. Ramprasad Pokhrel.

**ECF**  
Mechi province in south-eastern Nepal adopted.

**WORLD:**  
July 5 Dolly the sheep, the first mammal to be successfully cloned from an adult cell, is born at the Roslin Institute in Midlothian, Scotland.



**ECF**  
MED becomes a member of Partnership Committee of NGOs dedicated to the prevention of Blindness and Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind.

**ECF**  
New eye camps in Pursat Provincial Hospital and Kratie Provincial Hospital in Cambodia.

**ECF**  
Opening of a regional office in Bangkok.

**ECF**  
New project in Ladakh, North India.

**WORLD:**  
July 10 British scientists report that their DNA analysis findings from a Neanderthal skeleton support the out of Africa theory of human evolution.

**ECF**  
Pilot campaign 'A lens for a fellow man' in Alkmaar and Leiderdorp.

**ECF**  
New eye camp in China (in collaboration with the Kunming Medical College).

**ECF**  
Start of support for Indonesia.



**WORLD:**  
January 15 Online encyclopedia, Wikipedia, launches.

**ECF**  
New project Anxin in Hebei province, China.

**WORLD:**  
July 1 The International Criminal Court is established to prosecute individuals for crimes against humanity, war crimes, genocide and the crime of aggression.

**ECF**  
Support to an eye clinic in Stung Treng, Cambodia (in collaboration with Wilde Ganzen and ICCO).



**ECF**  
Opening of the second eye clinic in Stung Treng, Cambodia.

**WORLD:**  
March 19 U.S. and allied forces invade Iraq, beginning the Iraq War.

**ECF**  
Opening of the Ophthalmic District Hospital in Chitral, Pakistan (built in collaboration with the Ophthalmic Institute Peshawar).



**ECF**  
Foundation is now called Oogzorg Wereldwijd (Eye Care Worldwide).

**ECF**  
Partnership with Vision 2020 World-wide.

**ECF**  
Support Ophthalmology Residency Training, University of Health Sciences, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.



**ECF**  
First Damtot Damloop (annual charity run in Amsterdam).

**WORLD:**  
November 5 Saddam Hussein is sentenced by the Iraqi Special Tribunal to death by hanging.

1995 1996 1997 1998 1999 2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007

**ECF**  
Zwemfestijn (Swimming Festival) by Lions Club Bergen brings 80,000 guilders.

**ECF**  
Start of support to Mekong region in South China (in collaboration with Kunming Medical College).

**ECF**  
Mechi Eye Care Center opened in a rented building.

**ECF**  
7 new eye camps in Laos, Cambodia.

**ECF**  
Foundation is now called Oogzorg Himalaya (Eye Care Himalaya).



**WORLD:**  
September 5 Mother Teresa dies.



**WORLD:**  
September 4 Google is founded by Sergey M. Brin and Lawrence E. Page.

**WORLD:**  
January 1 The euro is introduced as an accounting currency to the world financial markets.

**ECF**  
New project in Tra Vinh, Vietnam.

**ECF**  
New projects in Pakistan.



**WORLD:**  
October 7 The United States invades Afghanistan, with participation from the British Armed Forces, in response to the September 11 attacks. The invasion marks the beginning of the current, ongoing war in Afghanistan.

**WORLD:**  
September 11.

**ECF**  
New project in Stung Treng, Cambodia.

**ECF**  
Outreach project in Ratanakiri, Cambodia (supported by Stung Treng province).

**ECF**  
Outreach project in Mondul Kiri, Cambodia (supported by Kratie province).

**WORLD:**  
December 13 Saddam Hussein is captured by US forces at a farmhouse in ad-Dawr.

**ECF**  
New project in Svay Rieng, Cambodia.

**ECF**  
New projects in Ghana, India, and Djibouti.

**WORLD:**  
December 26 Around 230,000 people in fourteen countries are killed as the Boxing Day Tsunami sends waves of up to 30 meters in height crashing into coasting communities.



**ECF**  
Fourth district clinic, in Gorkha, Nepal.



**WORLD:**  
February 4 Facebook is founded by Mark Zuckerberg.

**ECF**  
New project in Ber Tre and Hanoi, Vietnam.

**ECF**  
New office in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

**ECF**  
First close cooperation between Oogzorg Worldwide from Bloemendaal and Mekong Eye Doctors from Amstelveen.

**ECF**

Start Medical Advisory Board Eye Care Foundation.

**ECF**

There are now eight satellite clinics in operation from Himalayan Eye Hospital.



**ECF**

New project in the Houaphan province, Laos.

**ECF**

ECF supports the national training for ophthalmologists in Cambodia (in collaboration with the Fred Hollows Foundation (Australia).

**WORLD:**

Osama bin Laden is shot dead by United States Navy SEALs in Pakistan.

**ECF**

ECF supports the Kilimanjaro Christian Medical Center (Tanzania) eye camps and the Lira Referral Hospital, Uganda.

**ECF**

The renewed fundraising is starting to get under way.



**ECF**

ECF supports the Eye Department of the hospital in Morogoro, Tanzania.

**ECF**

ECF introduces quality control for cataract surgery in both hospitals (in collaboration with the European cataract and refraction association).

**WORLD:**

ISIL claims responsibility for a series of bombings in Brussels, a massacre at Istanbul's Ataturk Airport and car ramming attacks in Nice and Berlin.

**WORLD:**

The 'genocide' of Myanmar's Rohingya. The military in Buddhist majority Myanmar launched a crackdown on Rohingyas in the western-most Rakhine state after militants from the stateless Muslim minority ambushed security forces there. Nearly 650,000 Rohingyas were forced to flee Myanmar and find refuge in Bangladesh.

**ECF**

The Belgian production company Woestijnvis airs a documentary about the annual, long-term expeditions of OWW ophthalmologist Margreet Hogeweg to the high mountains in Karnali in Nepal.

**WORLD:**

January 20 Senator Barack Obama is inaugurated as the United States of America's first African American President.

**ECF**

Start of the second phase project in Chitral, Pakistan.

**ECF**

Support to Bawku Eye Care program in Ghana.

**ECF**

ECF supports the hospital in Tbong Khmum, Cambodia.

**WORLD:**

UN Climate Change Conference agrees to extend the Kyoto Protocol until 2020.

**ECF**

ECF Ambassadors installed.

**ECF**

ECF starts a ten-year strategic cooperation with Royal De Heus Vietnam to support projects in Laos.

**WORLD:**

Five former Soviet Union countries form the Eurasian Economic Union.

**ECF**

A big earthquake in Nepal.

**ECF**

A new five-year plan up to 2021 is created. Treatment of cataract and refraction abnormalities remain the priority.

**WORLD:**

Two tsunamis strike Indonesia, killing nearly 3000 people.

**ECF**

New projects in Rwanda and Zambia.

**WORLD:**

China votes to abolish leadership term limits, allowing President Xi Jinping to rule for life.

**ECF**

Two new projects in Ben Tre and Dong Thap, Vietnam.

**ECF**

Two new projects in Mbeya and Moschi, Tanzania.

**ECF**

Due to economic slope the fundraising goals are not reached.

**2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019**

**ECF**

Support to the Bawku Eye Care Program in Ghana.



**ECF**

June 30 Merger of MED and OWW into the Eye Care Foundation.

**WORLD:**

January 21 Stock markets around the world crash amid growing fears of a global recession.

**ECF**

Project monitoring from the Netherlands in Pakistan is now virtually impossible due to military action against the Taliban.

**WORLD:**

January 12 A 7.0-magnitude earthquake kills over 230,000 people in Haiti.



**ECF**

November 13 Opening of the new Mechi Eye Care Center by the Nepalese President Ram Baran Yadav.

**ECF**

New project in province of Kampong Cham, Vietnam.

**ECF**

A new five year plan for 2011-2015 is created.

**ECF**

ECF is active in 5 Asian and 3 African countries. Fundraising is being further strengthened.

**WORLD:**

Floods in Pakistan, Thailand and the Philippines kill approximately 2500 people.

**WORLD:**

A 9.0 earthquake in Japan triggers a tsunami and the meltdown of the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant.

**WORLD:**

The Danyang-Kunshan Grand Bridge, the world's longest, opens in China.

**WORLD:**

World population reaches 7 billion.

**WORLD:**

Typhoon Haiyan kills nearly 6,150 people in the Philippines and Vietnam.



**WORLD:**

The Rana Plaza collapses in Bangladesh.

**ECF**

Due to political-social unrest it is difficult to attract a solid staff in Bawku, Ghana. ECF contributes to the move to Bolgatanga.

**ECF**

Support to the outreach program carried out by the Lira Referral Hospital, Uganda.

**WORLD:**

The worst Ebola epidemic in recorded history occurs in West Africa, infecting nearly 30,000 people and resulting in the deaths of 11,000+.

**ECF**

New eye clinic in Xieng Khouang, Laos.

**WORLD:**

A series of earthquakes in the Himalayas kills over 10,000 people.

**ECF**

New eye clinic in Svay Rieng, Cambodia.

**ECF**

ECF supports the national program for information and awareness.

**WORLD:**

The United Nations lifts sanctions on Iran in recognition of its dismantling of its nuclear program.

**ECF**

Kick-off 10-year support to project Powering Progress with Eye Care by De Heus (Vinh Long province, Vietnam).

**ECF**

Standard Chartered Bank supports the project "Sight for Children and People Age Over 50 in the Mekong Delta 2016-2018", by the consortium ORBIS International, Hellen Keller International and Eye Care Foundation.

**WORLD:**

An outbreak of the Zika virus is linked to a cluster of cases of microcephaly.

**ECF**

ECF supports Eye for Zambia clinic in Macha.

**ECF**

ECF supports the construction of an eye clinic in Rwanda (in collaboration With Vision for All).

**ECF**

ECF supports the national program for information and awareness in Nepal.



**ECF**

The Eye Care Foundation celebrates 35 Years.



**WORLD:**

The first genetically modified humans reported, in China.

**VIETNAM**

1979  
Vietnam invades Cambodia and ousts the Khmer Rouge regime of Pol Pot. In response, Chinese troops cross Vietnam's northern border. They are pushed back by Vietnamese forces. The number of "boat people" trying to leave Vietnam causes international concern.



**EYE CARE**

The Third General Assembly of the IAPB is held in New Delhi, India. This Assembly is attended by over 400 ophthalmologists, eye-care professionals, public health specialists, managers, and others engaged in the battle against unnecessary blindness.

**LAOS**

Encouraged by the Gorbachev reforms in the Soviet Union, Laos introduces market-oriented reforms.

**VIETNAM**

Nguyen Van Linh becomes party leader. He introduces a more liberal economic policy.

**UGANDA**

Rebel leader Yoweri Museveni seizes power, heralding a period of stability and improved human rights.

**EYE CARE**

IAPB hosts a four-day series of conferences in Bethesda, Maryland, at which 70 people from more than 20 countries participate.



**EYE CARE**

The Lions Clubs International Foundation launches Sight First: a campaign to help restore sight and prevent blindness on a global scale.

**BHUTAN**

Thousands of Hindus flee to Nepal following clashes.

**VIETNAM**

Vietnamese troops withdraw from Cambodia.

**NEPAL**

Trade and transit dispute with India leads to border blockade by Delhi resulting in worsening economic situation.

**CAMBODIA**

A peace agreement is signed in Paris. A UN transitional authority shares power temporarily with representatives of the various factions in Cambodia. Sihanouk becomes head of state.

**NEPAL**

Nepali Congress Party wins first democratic elections.

**RWANDA**

New multi-party constitution promulgated.

**RWANDA**

President Habyarimana signs a power-sharing agreement with the Tutsis in the Tanzanian town of Arusha, ostensibly signalling the end of civil war; UN mission sent to monitor the peace agreement.

**GHANA**

New constitution, multi-party system is restored.

**EYE CARE**

The Fifth Assembly was held in Berlin, Germany from May 8 - 13.

**VIETNAM**

US lifts its 30-year trade embargo.

**RWANDA**

April  
Habyarimana and the Burundian president are killed after their plane is shot down over Kigali; RPF launches a major offensive; extremist Hutu militia and elements of the Rwandan military begin the systematic massacre of Tutsis. Within 100 days around 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus are killed; Hutu militias flee to Zaire, taking with them around 2 million Hutu refugees.

**VIETNAM**

Vietnam and US restore full diplomatic relations. Vietnam becomes full member of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean).

**TANZANIA**

Benjamin Mkapa chosen as president in Tanzania's first multi-party election.

**UGANDA**

New constitution legalises political parties but maintains ban on political activity.

**DJIBOUTI**

The government and the main faction of FRUD sign a power-sharing agreement officially ending the civil war; the radical faction of FRUD continues to fight.

Laos becomes member of Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Tutsis flee to Zaire, taking with them around 2 million Hutu refugees.

**ECF**

1984 World Blind Union (WBU) is founded.



**ECF**

The European Blind Union is founded. Its central office is in Paris, France.

**EYE CARE**

The manufacture of lenses was largely automated.



**EYE CARE**

Brien Holden Vision Institute (BHVI) founded in Australia.



**EYE CARE**

Helen Keller Services for the Blind founded in the United States of America.



**EYE CARE**

WHO Task Force completes a second comprehensive compilation and analysis of blindness data, and estimates that there are between 27 and 35 million blind people in the world.

**LAOS**

First elections held since 1975. All candidates have to be approved by the LPRP. Communists retain power.

**CHINA**

Troops open fire on pro-democracy protesters in Beijing's Tiananmen Square, killing hundreds of people.

**EYE CARE**

The Fourth General Assembly of the IAPB is held in Nairobi, Kenya, and is attended by more than 400 ophthalmologists, public health workers, and managers. National prevention of blindness committees from 60 countries are represented by 113 people at the Business Meeting.

**INDIA**

Government initiates a programme of economic liberalisation and reform, opening up the economy to global trade and investment.

**EYE CARE**

The WHO Prevention of Blindness headquarters staff are strengthened by a post supported by the International Association of Lions Clubs.

**EYE CARE**

There are five countries in Africa with optometric teaching institutes: Sudan, Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa and Tanzania.

**CAMBODIA**

The monarchy is restored, Sihanouk becomes king again. The country is renamed the Kingdom of Cambodia. The government-in-exile loses its seat at the UN.



**EYE CARE**

The Fred Hollows Foundation founded in Australia.

**VIETNAM**

New constitution adopted allowing certain economic freedoms. The Communist Party remains the leading force in Vietnamese society.

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1995

19



**LAOS**  
"Friendship bridge" over the Mekong linking Laos and Thailand is opened.



**EYE CARE**  
VISION 2020: The Right to Sight – the Global Initiative was formally launched from W.H.O. Headquarters, Geneva on February 18th, 1999.



**BHUTAN**  
Amnesty International raises serious concerns over human rights situation in southern Bhutan.

**CAMBODIA**  
*April*  
Pol Pot dies in his jungle hideout.

**BHUTAN**  
King cedes some powers to national assembly, giving up role as head of government

**PAKISTAN**  
Army chief Pervez Musharraf seizes power in coup, ousting Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

**INDONESIA**  
East Timor comes under UN administration.

**BHUTAN**  
First internet cafe opens in Thimphu; Bhutan hit by landslides following severe flooding in region, causing at least 200 deaths.

**RWANDA**  
*December*  
A new flag and national anthem are unveiled to promote national unity and reconciliation.

**EYE CARE**  
Dr Gro Harlem Brundtland, Director General of the World Health Organization, launches 'The State of World Blindness' report on World Sight Day in Geneva.

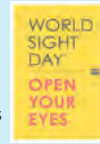
**NEPAL**  
*June 1*  
Crown Prince Dipendra kills King Birendra, Queen Aishwarya and several members of the royal family, before shooting himself. The king's brother, Gyanendra is crowned king.

**LAOS**  
*December*  
UN World Food Programme (WFP) launches three-year initiative to feed 70,000 malnourished children in Laos.

**CAMBODIA**  
A law setting up a tribunal to bring genocide charges against Khmer Rouge leaders is passed. International donors, encouraged by reform efforts, pledge \$560 million in aid.

**EYE CARE**  
Seeing is Believing – funding program of the Standard Chartered Bank – founded in the United Kingdom.

**EYE CARE**  
On the occasion of World Sight Day, Pope John Paul II officially recognises Vision 2020 and blessed the fight against blindness around the world.



**EYE CARE**  
The Seventh General Assembly is held in collaboration with the World Health Organization in Dubai, UAE.

**EYE CARE**  
Three new members join IAPB, taking its membership strength to 46.

**VIETNAM**  
First US commercial flight since the end of the Vietnam War touches down in Ho Chi Minh City.

**UGANDA**  
Referendum endorses multi-party politics but lifts presidential term limits.

**ZAMBIA**  
*January*  
Government launches economic recovery plan which envisages encouraging foreign investment.

**VIETNAM**  
*January*  
After 12 years of talks, Vietnam becomes the 150th member of the World Trade Organization.

**EYE CARE**  
The Eighth General Assembly of the IAPB is held in Buenos Aires, Argentina, with the theme, "Excellence and Equity in Eye Care".

**EYE CARE**  
Joshua Silver designed eyewear with adjustable corrective glasses.

**EYE CARE**  
Global Initiative for the Elimination of Avoidable Blindness Action Plan 2006-2011 is released by the WHO.

**PAKISTAN**  
Former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto is assassinated while on campaign trail for 2008 parliamentary election.

1996 1997 1998 1999 2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007 2008

**TANZANIA**  
*August*  
Al-Qaeda Islamist terror group bombs US embassies in Tanzania and Kenya.

**EYE CARE**  
The first silicone hydrogel contact lenses were released by Ciba Vision in Mexico.

**INDONESIA**  
Protests and rioting topple Suharto.

**CAMBODIA**  
Hun Sen mounts a coup against the prime minister, Prince Ranariddh, effectively taking sole power.

**EYE CARE**  
The Sixth General Assembly of IAPB was held in Beijing, P.R. China, between September 5 – 10, 1999. About 600 participants, from 57 countries attended the Assembly and included medical, technical, managerial and community health professionals involved in the field of eye care.

**EYE CARE**  
The profession of optometrist is legally recognized in the Netherlands and protected under Article 34 of the BIG Act.

**CAMBODIA**  
*December*  
First bridge across the Mekong River opens, linking east and west Cambodia.

**LAOS**  
International Monetary Fund approves a new three-year loan for Laos worth \$40 million. IMF officials expect the loan to help strengthen macro-economic stability and reduce poverty.

**INDIA**  
India's population tops 1 billion.

**ZAMBIA**  
*July*  
Zambia appeals for aid to feed some 2 million people after poor harvests caused by floods and drought.

**EYE CARE**  
The WHO Resolution on Elimination of Avoidable Blindness was adopted by the 56th World Health Assembly, which calls on all member states to commit themselves to VISION 2020 plans by 2005.

**EYE CARE**  
Lions Club International Foundation integrates "World Sight Day" – an event launched as a part of their Sight First campaign – with VISION 2020.

**INDONESIA**  
First-ever direct presidential elections.



**NEPAL**  
*April*  
Nepal joins the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

**EYE CARE**  
It is estimated that 125 million people worldwide use contact lenses.



**VIETNAM**  
Nguyen Van Linh becomes party leader. He introduces a more liberal economic policy.

**RWANDA**  
*October*  
First multi-party parliamentary elections.

**RWANDA**  
*January*  
Rwanda's 12 provinces are replaced by a smaller number of regions with the aim of creating ethnically-diverse administrative areas.

**TANZANIA**  
*August*  
The African Development Bank announces the cancellation of more than \$640m of debt owed by Tanzania, saying it was impressed with Tanzania's economic record and the level of accountability of public finance.

**EYE CARE**  
The IAPB decides to play the role of an information clearinghouse, to help ensure rehabilitation and support to the victims of the Boxing Day/South East Asia Tsunami.

**EYE CARE**  
The Durban Declaration on Refractive Error announced at the first World Congress on Refractive Error and Service Development.

**EYE CARE**  
Prevention of Blindness included in WHO strategic plan and objectives.

**NEPAL**  
Nepal becomes a republic after abolition of monarchy.

**UGANDA**  
Crackdown on Lord's resistance Army forces rebels to retreat from Uganda.

**VIETNAM**  
*December*  
China and Vietnam resolve border dispute 30 years after 1979 war which left tens of thousands dead.



**RWANDA**  
*October*  
Rwanda decides all education will be taught in English instead of French, officially as a result of joining the English-speaking East African Community.

**EYE CARE**

The 2009-2013 Action Plan for the Prevention of Avoidable Blindness and Visual Impairment is endorsed by the 62nd World Health Assembly.

**TANZANIA**

*July*  
Tanzania joins its neighbours in forming a new East African Common Market, intended to integrate the region's economy.

**LAOS**

*January*  
New stock market opens in Vientiane as part of tentative experiment with capitalism.

**RWANDA**

*November*  
Rwanda is admitted to the Commonwealth, as only the second country after Mozambique to become a member without a British colonial past or constitutional ties to the UK.

**ZAMBIA**

*February*  
Zambia and China sign mining cooperation agreement and deal to set up joint economic zone.

**GHANA**

Offshore oil production starts, fuelling Africa's fast-growing economy.

**VIETNAM**

*June* Vietnam surpasses Brazil to become the world's largest coffee exporter.

**CAMBODIA**

*July*  
Cambodia and Thailand withdraw their troops from a disputed border area near the Preah Vihear temple in line with a ruling by the International Court of Justice which aims to halt outbreaks of armed conflict in recent years.

**LAOS**

*July*  
Hillary Clinton becomes the first US secretary of state to visit Laos for 57 years. The legacy of the Vietnam War and a controversial dam project are on her agenda.

**VIETNAM**

*August*  
New decree bans internet users from discussing current affairs online.

**LAOS**

US commits 90 million US dollars over three years to help clear unexploded bombs the US dropped on Laos during the Vietnam War.

**DJIBOUTI**

Djibouti suffers its fourth straight year of drought.

**NEPAL**

*September*  
New constitution adopted - the first in Asia to specifically protect gay rights.

**EYE CARE**

First edition of the IAPB Vision Atlas.

**TANZANIA**

*February*  
Government bans several private health centres from providing HIV and AIDS-related services, accusing them of promoting homosexuality.

**ZAMBIA**

*July*  
President Lungu declares a state of emergency after a market blaze which he describes as sabotage. Critics fear a slide towards authoritarianism.

**PAKISTAN**

Former international cricket star Imran Khan becomes prime minister on a pledge to end corruption and dynastic politics.

**EYE CARE**

Publication of the World Report on Vision.

**LAOS**

*September*  
Conservationists warn that Laos has become the fastest growing ivory market in the world, undermining the international effort to stop the illegal trade.

**2009****2010****2011****2012****2013****2014****2015****2016****2017****2018****2019****NEPAL**

*January*  
UN ends its peace monitoring mission in Nepal.

**ZAMBIA**

*November*  
UN updates its Human Development Index, which suggests Zambia is now worse off than in 1970, partly due to AIDS.

**CHINA**

China becomes the world's second-largest economy after the United States, when Japan's economy shrank in the final months of the year.

**EYE CARE**

The average age of contact lens wearers globally was 31 years old.

**EYE CARE**

The 66th World Health Assembly unanimously approves 'Universal Eye Health: A Global Action Plan 2014-2019.

**LAOS**

*November*  
Laos approves plans to build a massive dam at Xayaburi, on the lower Mekong river, despite opposition from environmentalists and neighbours Cambodia and Vietnam.

**TANZANIA**

*March*  
The Statoil and Exxon Mobil oil exploration companies make major discovery of gas reserves off the coast of Tanzania.

**NEPAL**

*April*  
7.8-magnitude earthquake strikes Kathmandu and its surrounding areas killing more than 8,000 people, causing mass devastation and leaving millions homeless.

**INDIA**

Hindu nationalist BJP party scores the biggest election victory by any party in 30 years.

**VIETNAM**

*January*  
Vietnam introduces draft law requiring all adult citizens to donate blood once a month due to a shortage at national blood banks.

**CAMBODIA**

*February*  
Cambodia introduces lese-majeste law, which makes it a criminal offence to defame or insult the king.

**NEPAL**

China and Nepal hold their first ever joint military exercise.

**CAMBODIA**

*November*  
Supreme Court dissolves the Cambodia National Rescue Party, the country's only significant opposition party.

**LAOS**

*September*  
President Barack Obama becomes the first sitting US president to visit Laos.

**TANZANIA**

*April*  
Tanzania and Uganda agree to build East Africa's first major oil pipeline.

**ZAMBIA**

*August*  
President Lungu says he wants to introduce compulsory HIV testing to make Zambia free of the disease by 2030.

**LAOS**

*May*  
Some 69% of children in Laos lack basic health care, Save the Children charity reports.

**EYE CARE**

IAPB 2010 report launched to mark the halfway point of the goals of VISION 2020. The report comes just before new WHO preliminary estimates released after publication indicate that visual impairment prevalence has been reduced from 314 million people in 2004, to 285.3 million.