

Making ground exhibition

July 1 2010

Good evening everyone. I'm delighted to welcome you all to St-Martin-in-the-Fields and to this wonderful exhibition of images from WaterAid's work in Tanzania and Uganda taken by Olivia Arthur from Magnum Photos.

This has been a hugely exciting project for us and is providing the opportunity to reach many, many thousands of people over the coming weeks with these powerful images.

As you know WaterAid works in Africa, Asia and the Pacific to help poor communities to get safe water to drink, improved toilets and better hygiene. Life saving work that transforms lives - a first major step out of poverty.

As I mentioned Olivia is from Magnum Photos. A name known to us all for some of the world's most beautifully and powerful images – as you will have seen from Olivia's work.

This exhibition has already been shown in The Hague, Dar Es Salaam and Kampala. We also displayed the photos in the communities themselves:

In Amuria in north-east Uganda – an area that has suffered from the atrocities of the Lords Resistance Army

In Chigongwe and Michese, in rural Tanzania.

For obvious reasons, we couldn't transport the full scale exhibition – instead we put the pictures onto a banner – which you can see <<indicate location>> – and took that into schools in the communities.

We had a really positive response from people there, which is testament to the way Olivia photographed their lives with respect, accuracy and dignity. Their approval means that we bring you this exhibition in partnership with the communities we photographed.

And now this truly international exhibition comes to London – to a venue that has an auspicious history. St-Martin-in-the-Fields has a long tradition of taking an active role in international and humanitarian issues, and so it's a fitting place to have an exhibition like this.

So, why are we here?

We're here because we want people to stop and think. As you've seen tonight, the main focus of the images is not only about pumps or wells or latrines. Instead, the pictures show people getting on with their lives: getting an education, doing the chores, running a business.

The message of Making Ground is that these communities are able to do all those things

because they have safe water, sanitation and improved hygiene.

I hope you have had the chance to look at the pictures and the stories. They are moving and inspiring – people thriving when free from ill-health and drudgery.

I'm sure you all noticed the pictures of Hotel Arizona in Amuria, Uganda and I would like to read you a quote from Samuel Okello, the owner:

Samuel said,

“Water is the key to development – the key to so many things. You can't run businesses without it. I would like to set up catering for guests in the restaurant. But it is so difficult to do without water, so challenging.

Everyone is excited now, everyone wants to be connected. Electricity can come second, and we need water first. Water is white gold here.”

Water and sanitation unlock potential – letting people get on with their lives and livelihoods.

The exhibition helps us see that - water, sanitation and improved hygiene have the power to change – to transform poor communities in developing countries. I'm sure you've found the images as inspirational as I have.

A huge thank-you to Olivia for making this wonderful exhibition happen - to the Dutch National Postcode Lottery for all their generous support and also a big thank you to our colleagues in the Dutch NGO Simavi for their invaluable collaboration.

Leading the project throughout has been Jess Crombie, WaterAid's Picture Editor. She must be very proud to see the fruits of her labours tonight after the last 18 months. Well done Jess.

Finally I would like to thank you to all of you who support WaterAid's for coming tonight and for all you do to help our vital work that really does transform lives.

We would like to encourage you to keep supporting us - WaterAid has set some very ambitious targets - we would like to reach another 25 million people with safe water and improved hygiene and sanitation by 2015. Please help us to achieve that.

Finally to Olivia. We have been so honoured to be working with someone of Olivia's calibre and thank her for creating such stunning images.