



PRESS RELEASE

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HRH The Princess Royal, Patron of Mercy Ships International, at launch of fund to support more volunteers in life-changing work in Africa

- HRH The Princess Royal, Patron of Mercy Ships International, attended a 45th anniversary celebratory dinner with the charity on paddle steamer The Elizabethan, on the River Thames, London last night [26 Sept 2023].
- At the event, the charity launched a new Volunteer Support Fund to enable more volunteers to consider being involved in the life-changing work on its two hospital ships
- Mercy Ships relies on skilled volunteers, in partnership with developing nations, to deliver accessible, free surgery and medical care for those in unjust poverty and urgent need.
- HRH The Princess Royal is a long-term supporter of Mercy Ships. She visited hospital ship the *Global Mercy* at its launch in Rotterdam in March 2022 and the *Africa Mercy* in Sierra Leone in 2011.

LONDON – WEDNESDAY 27 SEPTEMBER 2023

HRH The Princess Royal attended a 45th anniversary dinner with Mercy Ships last night [26 September 2023] where she celebrated the role of volunteers in delivering the charity's life changing work on its two hospital ships.

The charity launched a new Volunteer Support Fund during the evening, to enable more volunteers from developing nations to consider being involved in the life-saving work of bringing surgical care to those who need it most.

The Princess Royal, who became the Patron of Mercy Ships International in 2020, is a long-term supporter of the charity.

Last night, HRH The Princess Royal celebrated the work of the many volunteers who have played a vital role in enabling Mercy Ships to change lives over the past 45 years and the opportunity the new fund will bring. She spoke of how it would remove the barriers for a new generation of volunteers, those from developing nations and anywhere in the world, giving the opportunity to learn alongside international colleagues and bring those skills back to their own countries.

International charity Mercy Ships operates hospital ships that deliver free, safe surgeries and life-changing healthcare to people in sub-Saharan Africa where 9 out of 10 people cannot access safe surgery.

Each year, more than 3,000 volunteers from over 60 countries serve on board the world's two largest civilian hospital ships, the *Africa Mercy* and the *Global Mercy*. Professionals such as surgeons, dentists, nurses, health trainers, cooks, and engineers dedicate their time and skills to accelerate access to safe surgical, obstetric, and anaesthetic care.

It is hoped the fund will remove the financial burden and make the opportunity to volunteer more accessible to those from developing nations who have the desire to use their expertise and skills for Mercy Ships.

Many volunteers from the UK and around the world will be volunteering onboard the *Global Mercy*, which has now docked in Freetown, Sierra Leone for the next 10 months. These include nurses, surgeons, teachers, physical therapists, radiologists, anaesthetists, admin staff, and even a captain of the ship.

Mrs Rachel Buckingham, Consultant Paediatric Orthopaedic Surgeon at the Oxford University Trust, also spoke at the anniversary dinner. She explained why she gives up her annual leave to volunteer on board and what a privilege and joy it is for her to see the lasting legacy left to both patients and in-country professionals she mentors and trains.

Mercy Ships UK CEO Joanne Balaam said: "We are delighted that our patron HRH The Princess Royal was here to celebrate our 45th anniversary and while we launch our Volunteer Support Fund. Her Royal Highness' continuing support and recognition of all our volunteers' efforts is more important than ever as we need more than 3,000 a year to volunteer on our two-ship fleet.

“There are so many open-hearted professionals who would love to give their time and effort to serve with Mercy Ships and transform lives but sacrificing their income to do so can prove impossible for many volunteers, especially those from developing nations. Although many have the support of family, friends, communities and churches to do so, not everyone can access the same support network.

“We hope this will make a transformational difference to our patients and the legacy of Mercy Ships in sub-Saharan Africa.”

Mercy Ships was started in 1978 by Don and Deyon Stephens. Since then, it has worked in more than 55 countries, helped more than 1.2 million people see their lives changed and performed more than 110,000 life-changing surgeries.

HRH The Princess Royal is a longstanding supporter of Mercy Ships. In 2011, she visited the *Africa Mercy* hospital ship in Sierra Leone. Last year, she visited Mercy Ships' newest ship, the *Global Mercy*, in Rotterdam before it sailed to Senegal.

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About Mercy Ships

Mercy Ships operates hospital ships that deliver free, safe surgeries and life-changing healthcare to women, men and children in sub-Saharan Africa. An international faith-based charity, Mercy Ships has partnered with African nations and local organisations over the past three decades, to provide training to local healthcare professionals and support the construction of medical infrastructure.

Each year, more than 3,000 volunteers from over 60 countries serve on board the world's two largest civilian hospital ships, the *Africa Mercy* and the *Global Mercy*. Professionals such as surgeons, dentists, nurses, health trainers, cooks, and engineers dedicate their time and skills to accelerate access to safe surgical, obstetric, and anaesthetic care.

To learn more about Mercy Ships, visit mercyships.org.uk, or follow @mercyshipsuk on social media.

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