



# *The Lady Fatemah (a.s.) Charitable Trust*

September Lodge, Village way, Little Chalfont  
Buckinghamshire HP7 9PU

Address by the Chair Trustee

**At the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Gala Dinner Organised on 12<sup>th</sup> May 2007**

Venue: London Heathrow Marriott Hotel



## **Bismillah hir Rahman nir Raheem**

### **In the name of God, The Most Kind, The Most Merciful**

Our distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, Salaam Alaykum, Welcome and Good Evening. It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to our 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala Dinner. I can hardly believe it's been a decade since the Trust was formed. Starting out from small, humble beginnings The Lady Fatemah Trust has grown to serve the needs of thousands of impoverished people worldwide.

First and foremost, may I take this opportunity to sincerely thank you for attending this event. I know I speak on behalf of all the Trustees and Volunteers of the Trust, when I say we are all extremely honoured that you are here tonight. It is only through your support and generous contributions that our work is possible. Imagine ladies and gentlemen, in an article written in the Guardian earlier this year, it said "There's plenty of food around but the poor are just too poor to buy it.' With so much poverty globally, the task of humanitarian relief seems daunting. Working in isolation, each of us can only make tiny impacts. But collectively we can effect real positive change.

Last year we raised a phenomenal £60,000 at the gala dinner, which supported our micro finance projects in Iraq, Iran and India. Those who rely on aid are trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty. The Trust seeks to break this cycle by empowering individuals and communities through sustainable development programmes and income generation projects. Borrowing an ancient maxim, the Trust does not simply distribute fish, but rather 'fishing rods' and the knowledge to utilise them effectively. Only when individuals are given the means and skills to help themselves and the communities around them can poverty be eradicated. Other areas we focus on include education, healthcare, provision of water, improvement of the infrastructure and micro finance projects. In addition, we provide relief to victims of natural disasters, wars and famine. Our activities are outlined in the brochures provided, or ladies and gentlemen you can visit our website where comprehensive details of all our projects and appeals with photographs and accounts can be found.

Tel +44 (0) 1494 762 063, Email [info@ladyfatemahtrust.org](mailto:info@ladyfatemahtrust.org), Fax +44 (0) 1494 762 286,  
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What sets us aside from other charitable organisations is that we operate on the basis of zero administration fees, thus ensuring each and every penny you generously donate goes directly and fully to those in need. In addition if you are a UK taxpayer and sign a gift aid declaration form, we can reclaim 28% of the tax on all your donations. This, I assure you, is an invaluable additional contribution, and really makes a significant difference.

Where possible, we work in partnership with local organisations on the ground, who carefully verify each appeal received. This approach allows us to utilise local expertise as these organisations are directly in touch with the communities where the need is greatest. We have found that by working together, the results of our work surpass those of any one charitable organization working on its own.

I would like to take a few moments now to make you acquainted with some of the projects the Trust has implemented in many countries across the developing world.

### **India:**

The provision of and access to clean water is a basic human right, yet it is a challenge faced by many communities worldwide. Approximately fifty water wells have been dug and equipped with either hand pumps or submerged electric water pumps in drought-stricken villages all across India. They have been named in the memory of Bibi Sakina. Each well costs approximately £1,000, and can transform the lives of a whole community almost overnight by providing reliable access to clean drinking water and re-generating the agricultural economy.

Health is something we all too often take for granted. But in many developing countries this is quite literally a luxury people can not afford. Disease strikes an individual, but it affects his or her whole family. Sick fathers or mothers cannot provide or care for their families, a sick child or elderly person puts considerable strain on the family. The medical appeals received from India have always been for life threatening diseases as for example cases of coronary artery disease and those of patients in need of heart valve replacements, heart transplants and cancer treatment.

Education and micro finance projects are another key area of the Trust's activities in India, which tackle the root causes of poverty. They provide destitute people with the means and skills necessary to generate an income and allow them to be economically independent. The Trust has been involved in funding grants for basic and higher education since its inception in 1997. Recently the Trust sponsored 45 destitute students in Mysore who attend St Paul's Nursery, Primary and High School. Earlier in the year we supported 40 students at Elite Educational Trust, Bangalore with school fees and uniforms, as their families were unable to afford this. Undergraduates studying for degrees in medicine and engineering have been supported in the past. The Trust closely monitors the progress of every student during the period he or she is supported. Without your support ladies and gentlemen, these children would not go to school and would almost certainly end up in workshops doing child labour.

Micro finance projects have included providing skilled seamstresses heading their families with a sewing machine, and sending girls to attend tailoring courses before giving them a machine. Due to their poverty, the purchase of a sewing machine is far beyond the reach of such families. Sewing and embroidery are crafts that can be taken up with minimal investment working from home, and enable these households to become self sufficient

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Another project has been to provide rickshaws and taxis to destitute families as a grant. This prevents these families from taking out large loans and having to pay heavy monthly mortgage payments from a subsistence income.

Elderly people in Southern India have been enrolled in an effective project to make them self-sufficient through light work. The project supplies them with a milking cow and a cash grant for one month's fodder. The cow's milk will satisfy their own needs and create sufficient income for food and fodder for the following month. Such projects empower individuals and therefore communities to become self-sufficient and regain their dignity.

### **Iraq:**

As war and internal strife continue to plague Iraq, it is sad to watch how innocent people fall victim to this violence. According to Caritas International, which is based in Vatican City, "Malnutrition rates have risen in Iraq from 19 percent before the US-led invasion to a national average of 28 percent four years later". In the same report is stated - and I quote - "Over 11 percent of newborn babies are born underweight in Iraq today, compared with a figure of 4 percent in 2003. Before March 2003, Iraq already had significant infant mortality due to malnutrition because of the international sanctions regime". A report published by the Red Cross recently said 'the suffering that Iraqi men, women and children are enduring today is unbearable and unacceptable. 1.5 million internally displaced people lack basic necessities such as adequate food, drinking water, sanitation, and healthcare.' According to the latest statistics, the number of internally displaced stands at over 1.9 million now and is rising daily.

Internally displaced families were threatened at their place of residence due to their ethnicity or religion and had no choice but to escape their neighbourhoods and seek refuge elsewhere in Iraq, where they live under extremely poor conditions. In such a situation, relief aid is essential since the communities lack the most basic infrastructure to cope, and would perish otherwise. During the winter, the Trust provided more than 3500 blankets to 635 families and a gas cylinder per family to another 600 families for cooking meals.

The number of needy orphans in Iraq is perhaps greater than in any other country. In the same Red Cross report I just referred to, an aid worker in Baghdad recalled visiting one bombed street where he saw a four-year-old boy sitting beside his mother's body, which had been decapitated by the explosion. He was talking to her, asking what had happened. He had only been taken out on a shopping trip, with his mum. Ladies and gentleman, such cries are heard every day from thousands of orphans across the country. No amount of financial assistance can ever replace a parent's love, but we can give these children hope, in an almost hopeless situation. It only costs 50 pence per day, ladies and gentlemen, to sponsor an orphan. It really isn't much at all, but will offer a little child the chance of a brighter future. There are many thousands of orphans in Iraq today but due to the lack of funds, we are currently only able to support a very limited number. At present, we are assisting seventy orphans in Kerbala, seventy in Najaf and fifty in Basra.

In Najaf, our coordinator reported that some widows were selling their food ration in order to buy stationery for their orphans. The Trust distributed 2,550 notebooks to boys and girls in eight schools. Joy and delight were clearly visible on the children's faces when they carried away their beautiful, coloured notebooks. Primary school children were so eager to obtain a notebook that they would come to the LFT coordinator and say: "Sitti (Lady), I am an orphan. My grandfather died." And another: "My sister died." And: "My brother died" Or: "My aunt died." In the high schools, students whose names were not on the lists quietly came and told the coordinator: "Sitti, we are poor and our situation is very weak." Even a number of poor university students received notebooks, as did the orphans sponsored by LFT.

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Following the success of the milking cow project in India, a milking buffalo project was set up in the marshlands around Basra. Currently over 870 people are benefiting from the purchase of 80 buffalos and cows, which yield enough milk for the family, while the surplus is sold to generate income. Thanks to your support, these families are now self-sufficient and the children no longer go to bed hungry.

The 'water tank project' is another innovative project, which was set up earlier this year in Basra. The Trust provides a tank, hosing and an initial fill up of fresh water to a needy family, who sells the water to the inhabitants of its neighbourhood, thereby earning an income as well as providing an invaluable service.

Wheelchairs have also been provided for 50 Iraqi men and women. Some of them had not left their houses for more than ten years. Now they can move independently and even have the opportunity to earn a living.

In the year 2004 and 2005, the Trust set up two non-profit eye care facilities in Karbala and Basra. Many people in developing countries are needlessly blind because they do not have access to basic eye treatments. Simple measures, such as the provision of spectacles or cataract surgery can prevent blindness or restore sight, thereby restoring the patients' independence. Last year, over eight thousand patients were treated at the Karbala Eye Clinic, and in Basra from May to December 2006 nearly 2,000 patients were treated despite the volatile conditions there.

At this point ladies and gentleman, I would just like to pause for a moment and remember my dear friend, Marhoom Mehboobhai Suleman who was instrumental in establishing the Karbala Eye Clinic. He and his family met with a tragic car accident on their way to Medina in July 2005, and we pray to the Almighty to shower His mercy on the departed souls, granting them an elevated place in Paradise. Please can I request you to observe a moment's silence and recite one sura e fateha. Thank you.

### Iran:

In cooperation with our local partner in Iran, the Lady Fatemah Trust is implementing a Medical Referral Program for patients from Iraq as well as refugee patients. During the previous regime, Iraqi medical infrastructure was devastated by neglect, restrictions on study abroad and international sanctions. The country now does not have the technology or the resources to deal with the healthcare requirements of its population, and while the affluent go to Europe, America and the Gulf states, poorer patients turn to Iran. Iran is close and requires little travel cost, visas are easy to obtain, and some Iraqis have relatives still residing in Iran as refugees. The MRP is not simply a charity program that gives out money to cure ailments. On the contrary, it is a program that supports and empowers sick people who generally do work, but whose incomes are insufficient to cover the cost of treatment. The treatments range from simple rehabilitative measures, to more complex, lifesaving procedures. The aim is to restore the patients' health to the point where they can resume their place within the family unit and within society. Since the beginning of this program in October 2005, over 1,400 patients have been treated. Ladies and Gentlemen, this project needs £7-9,000.00 per month to treat an average of 90-100 patients. Our partners in Iran who are in contact with these patients have appealed to us not to stop funding this project, even though it is costly to sustain. So I urge you please to sign a standing order mandate before you leave this evening, even if it is only for £10 per month. Every bit makes a difference.

The Trust has recently expanded the milking cow project to Ahwaz, the capital of the Iranian province Khuzestan. Three milking cows have initially been purchased for three poor Iraqi refugee families consisting of 22 members. Fodder is obtained free of charge from public land. One cow

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The Lady Fatemah Charitable Trust creates about £50.00 a month in income, which is a significant proportion of a family's monthly expense.

In Iran, most Iraqi and Afghani refugees are desperately poor and the illiteracy rate especially among the Afghans is extremely high. Nevertheless, all refugees are well aware of the importance of education. With the assistance of educated refugees, informal schools have been established to educate the refugee children. The Imam Mehdi School is a school for Iraqi refugee children, and thanks to your support, it was supplied with a water purifying system and a computer last March. The school charges £20 fees per year and even this is a sizeable sum for the families who often need to take a loan to pay. The children come from families that live below the poverty line; many of them have lost their fathers. The number of students has almost doubled to 722 this year because Imam Mehdi School charges the lowest fees among several schools for Iraqi refugee children. Six new teachers needed to be employed to cope with this rise, and the Trust helped fund their salaries for the academic year. The Trust, through its partner, also assisted a number of informal schools for Afghani refugee children and provided new uniforms to the students of three schools. If you visit the website ladies and gentlemen you will see big smiles of joy on the students' faces.

The Kha'zali school for the blind is the first school for blind children established in Iran, and is situated in downtown Tehran. All 101 blind students come from poor families, and the school seeks to provide them with a cane, a tape recorder to assist them with independent studying and a special typewriter to enable them to write. Without the opportunity to study, these children may well be condemned to a life of dependency and isolation.

The Trust continues to support the Sultaniyah Iraqi Refugee camp where elderly refugees with no one to look after them live. The Trust meets the cost of their daily food and basic necessities. We also provided winter clothes as the winter in this part of Iran can become extremely unforgiving.

The Trust sponsors 196 Iraqi orphans in Iran. Please ladies and gentlemen, let us together help more of these children. I urge you to please do something special, and help these special people by completing a standing order mandate.

### Lebanon

This year the Trust has formed a partnership with a charitable organization focussing on caring for the disabled based in Nabatieh, South Lebanon. As you are all aware this part of the country was badly hit during the recent war. The first project carried out was distribution of food to the most needy families during the holy month of Ramadan, where a total of 721 people benefited. As with previous years, assistance was also sent to Iraq, Iran, India, Kenya and Tanzania.

The Trust also recently began to assist victims of cluster bombs and mines in Lebanon who have sustained horrific injuries during or after the conflict. There are currently over 1000 patients who desperately require assistance. Close to a million unexploded bombs are estimated to litter southern Lebanon. This equates to "One Unexploded Bomb Per Person". In the weeks and months to come only The Almighty knows how many will meet with minor, major or fatal accidents. Please ladies and gentlemen, help us to help them, it is the least we can do.

Another project implemented in cooperation with our Lebanese partner assists 64 children with special needs to develop their abilities and become as self-reliant as possible. These children have learning disabilities, are motor or speech impaired, or are deaf. With special care and therapy costing only £40 per month, they will have a future to look forward to.

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The Trust has also taken up the project of assisting bright students in Lebanon to complete their University education who otherwise would not be able to continue due to financial constraint because of the recent war.

Lastly, in keeping with the ethos of the Trust, Micro Finance, we have started assisting the most deserving heads of family re-establish their business, thereby enabling them to earn their livelihood with dignity.

### **East Africa – Madagascar**

The Trust has been funding eye camps in Tanzania, where cataract surgery and other ophthalmic procedures have been carried out. The camps are set up in desperately poverty stricken areas where the people there have little or no access to such facilities. Each cataract costs a mere £ 40.00 ladies and gentleman. That's all it costs to save someone's sight. An eye camp led by Dr Riaz Asaria, a member of the Lady Fatemah Trust, was also set up in Madagascar last June, where retinal laser and cataract surgery was carried out, and training given to the local eye surgeons. Planning for the next camp in August is already underway.

Another project, which the Trust took up last year, is assisting the burns ward at Mt Meru Hospital, Arusha. I can hardly bear to see the pictures of small children with the most horrible burn injuries they usually sustained when falling into open fires at home. Their wounds can take many months to heal, and without specialist care can be fatal. With your help, we can reach out and help these little children.

So you can see ladies and gentlemen, that our work is dedicated wholly to humanitarian relief and assisting our less fortunate fellow human beings worldwide. From disaster relief to long-term development programmes, the Trust has helped save and improve the lives of thousands of people thanks to your generous support. However there is an enormous amount of work that remains to be done.

Ladies and Gentleman, Imam Redha a.s. has said "The best and most respected virtue of a man is to do good and to fulfill the desires of the needy."

### **Standing Order**

Ladies and Gentlemen, in the last ten years, through the financial support and generous donations, the Trust has brought smiles and comfort to thousands of widows, orphans and aged people, as well as refugees and other vulnerable groups, as you have heard this evening.

However, there are thousands who desperately still require assistance.

In the short term, your pledges and donations are invaluable, but what the Trust needs to continue its work in the long term is a consistent guaranteed income. And the only way to reach this aim is through your completing a standing order mandate, which you will find enclosed in your brochure packs. I am going to ask you all, ladies and gentlemen to please take out the mandates now, and have a look. I am a beggar standing here before you this evening, asking for just one pound a day. That's £30.00 a month, a sum that will sponsor 2 orphans. Please, I urge you to dig deep.. the need is vast, these people are crying out for our help. Every year, I am overwhelmed by your generosity and touched by your kindness. If you have been moved or inspired by any of our projects, please

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continue to support us. We all have a responsibility to help, and remember: Only The Almighty knows the reward of giving.

As the HOLY QURAN chapter 2, verse 245 states:

“Who is it that will offer of Allah a goodly gift, so He will multiply it to him manifold, and Allah straitens and amplifies, and you shall be returned to Him.”

You can contribute any amount, at an interval that is convenient to you. And remember, ladies and gentlemen, every penny you donate goes to those in need, as all the members of the Trust work on a voluntary basis, thereby ensuring we have no administration costs.

### **Ijaaza**

Finally as I am sure you are aware, The Lady Fatemah Trust has been granted Ijaaza by Ayatollah al-Uzma Seyed Ali Seestani to collect Khums money. Basically what this means is the Trust is allowed to collect religious dues or Islamic tax on behalf of Ayatollah Seestani, and utilise part of it for worthy projects.

### **Vision**

As we look towards the future, we are faced with the reality that very large sections of the world's community live in dire poverty. At the Trust, we are seeking to assist these people not only through relief aid, but also through building their capacity to help themselves, re-gain dignity and become self sufficient. We believe everyone has the right to be safe, healthy, skilled and equal, regardless of race or religion, and we are committed to achieving this.

Finally dear guests, I would like to conclude by saying a heartfelt thank you for being here tonight. It is solely through your generosity that our works is possible, and believe me ladies and gentlemen; your kindness has touched the lives of some of the neediest communities around the world. As the numbers of appeals keep increasing, I pray the momentum of the Trust grows in proportion. I hope you continue to enjoy the rest of the evening, and inshallah, God willing, I hope to see you again next year.

***Thank you and Wassalaam***

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