

# Israel offers medical aid to Nigerian kids

**S**UCCOUR could be on the way for thousands of Nigerian children suffering from various degrees of heart diseases, as the state of Israel has offered to use its medical expertise to get them well again.

To this end, the Israeli embassy in Nigeria is committing all expenditure meant for its national day celebration this year into the "Save a child's heart project" which will involve Israeli medical experts already on their way to the country in collaboration with Nigerian healthcare providers on the matter.

Speaking yesterday at a briefing in Abuja, the Israeli Ambassador to Nigeria, Moshe Ram, stressed that Israel was making a shift in its policy towards Nigeria beyond the promotion of trade relations to humanitarian gestures to demonstrate "that we care about what is happening in Nigeria and that our country will like to take a small share of her burdens, the health problems of Nigeria..."

According to the envoy, the Israeli gesture was spurred by a report in *The Guardian* of February 7 entitled "Mide's Heart-Rendering Story," written by Bisi Alabi-Williams. It is the story of three-year-old Mide Mamufha Midegbeyevesho Ayebelehin who has lived with a hole in his heart from birth.

The ambassador disclosed yesterday that having reached Mide's parents, the little boy will now be flown to Israel with the aid of Save A Child's Heart Foundation (SACH), an Israel-based Foundation that has been saving lives by working to

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improve the quality of cardiac care for children worldwide.

Thousands of Nigerians, especially children, are said to be suffering from heart diseases. Israel runs a few other collaborative programmes with Nigerian concerns, mainly in the area of agriculture and energy. It is the first time a major push is being made in the area of healthcare.

Speaking on how Israel intends to cope with the expected barrage of cases given Nigeria's population, Ram said: "SACH is a strong foundation that has saved more than 2,000 children from over 30 countries around the world... It costs about \$10,000 to save the life of a child requiring heart surgery and there are presently 1,000 on our waiting list. But we are committed to this project. It is a matter of the heart, not the money..."

Ram said it was for this reason that the state of Israel would not be celebrating its independence day in Nigeria this year. "This is just the beginning, but we have committed all expenditure for the independence celebration this year to this project. Instead, we are having a Save a Child Exhibition and a one-day international workshop next week. We are bringing in Israeli experts in paediatrics and cardiology. It is being done in collaboration with the National Hospital Abuja. It is primarily designed to benefit members of the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA) in general medical practice, paediatricians and cardiologists."

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