



Media Release – For Immediate Use

Innovative training program launched to reduce drowning rates along the River Nile in Sudan

Wednesday 6 October 2011:

As part of a unique initiative to reduce the burden of drowning along the River Nile, The Nile Swimmers Project will soon train Sudanese villagers living along the world's longest river in vital water safety skills.

Given that Africa has the world's highest drowning mortality rate, the River Nile poses a major threat to the lives of thousands of villagers who depend on the river for survival. As such, the ten-day training program from October 21 is designed to provide essential drowning prevention, swimming, water rescue and emergency first aid skills to 15 participants from villages along the length of the river, who will then transfer their water safety knowledge and skills to their own communities.

The Nile Swimmers Project is a joint initiative with the Sudanese Sea Scouts and works to reduce the occurrence of drowning deaths along the River Nile. It is the first large-scale drowning prevention project to be implemented on the river at a community level.

The training program was successfully held in 2007 and 2008, and now has full technical support from many national and international organizations including the Sudanese Sea Scouts, The Royal Life Saving Society Commonwealth, Rescue 3 Europe and Rights and Humanity.

Royal Life Saving Society Commonwealth instructor Tom Mecrow, who also co-founded The Nile Swimmers Project, said "This is an excellent opportunity for a community based approach to tackle a leading cause of death in Sudan. Despite the river being used for daily chores, fishing and transportation, very few people in Sudan know how to swim and water safety guidelines on boats are rarely put into practice."

"By taking a community based approach and building the capacity of local villagers, the project aims to create a bottom-up response to drowning, which has been shown to be effective in Europe, Australia, and parts of South East Asia," Mr Mecrow added.

Each year, one million people drown globally. 96% of these drowning deaths occur in low and middle income countries, which is around 6 times higher than drowning rates in developed countries.

To date, no research has been carried out on the exact drowning figures along the River Nile, however volunteer coordinator and Nile Swimmers co-founder Tilal Salih says that in the hundreds of interactions he has had with river communities in Sudan, the majority of villagers know someone who has lost their life in the river.

Mr Salih said "It is estimated by the World Health Organization that Africa has one of the highest continental rates of drowning in the world. What we aim to achieve with this training program is to

show communities that drowning is preventable. By providing these innovative training sessions free to participants, and providing a platform for communities to develop locally relevant and low-cost interventions, we believe we can save many lives from drowning along the River Nile.”

“Everyone in Sudan knows that drowning on the River Nile is a massive problem. Now is the time to do something about it,” Mr Salih added.

While the project is currently being implemented in Sudan, with additional funding The Nile Swimmers Project aims to expand into all countries in the Nile Basin.

“Our aim is to see The Nile Swimmers Project and training sessions replicated in every village along the River Nile” says internationally accredited instructor and co-founder Dan Graham. “The nature of the river changes significantly along its length and as it flows through 11 countries. As such, local interventions must be developed and local communities must take ownership of this initiative to ensure water safety principles are adopted in all villages.”

The Nile Swimmers Project also aims to promote sustainable peace by bringing together people from different backgrounds, often previously engaged in or affected by conflict.

Mr Graham added “Participants in the training program will also gain personal and professional skills and be trained in wider leadership and facilitation skills, public health awareness and team building, enabling them to contribute to the social and political development of their community on their return home.”

The Nile Swimmers Project training program will run between 21 October and 1 November 2011 in Sudan, approximately one hour south of Khartoum. More information about the project can be found at www.nileswimmers.org.

All media enquiries, including information about media interested in attending the training sessions, should be directed to:

Sudanese Media

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NOTE TO MEDIA:

All media are invited to attend an open morning session of The Nile Swimmers Project on Wednesday 26 October 2011. A boat will leave from the Sudan Sea Scouts Headquarters on the river front at 10:00am. You will be returned to the Sea Scouts HQ at 1 pm. Lunch and refreshments will be provided.

Please contact Tilal Salih (tilal@nileswimmers.org) if you wish to participate. Media opportunities will include demonstrations and opportunities for you to talk to participants and instructors.