

Clean drinking water for Haiti

In December 2016 the Bavarian company Ujeta GmbH (www.ujeta.com) donated 10 new UJETA “CARE” water filters together with replacement filters and accessories to the Kindernothilfe children's aid organisation for use in Haiti.

In order to see the local conditions for himself and train the staff in the use of the devices, Michael Astl (UJETA Sales) travelled in person to the area destroyed by Hurricane Matthew.

Michael Astl talks about his experience and gives his impressions:

HAITI, DECEMBER 2016

The journey to Port-au-Prince, the capital of the Caribbean state of Haiti, included a stopover in Miami and went relatively smoothly.

As soon as you leave the aircraft in Port-au-Prince, you're suddenly catapulted into a different world. The journey from the airport to the hotel alone gives some idea of the conditions that prevail here. There are piles of rubbish as far as the eye can see, and some of the roads seem to consist solely of deep potholes that have to be bridged with planks of wood. Plastic rubbish burns in the ditches alongside the roads, giving off an acrid, toxic smoke that even in the early morning hours sometimes darkens the sky above the city and makes breathing difficult.

The faces, too, of the people of this city of 2 million inhabitants display a depressing mixture of hopelessness and lethargy. This isn't just caused by the general economic and political difficulties of the country: it's also due to the many natural disasters such as earthquakes and tropical storms that won't leave the country and its people in peace.



Impressions of Port-au-Prince

In October 2016 Hurricane Matthew caused more than 1,000 fatalities as well as injuring many people and also hit the already sparse infrastructure of the country hard.

My first priority was to ensure that the airfreight shipment with the water filters landed on schedule and cleared customs. After hours of very stressful correspondence and telephone calls with the airline, the shipment, which at that time was held in the transshipment hub at Miami International Airport, was finally booked and confirmed on the next flight.

The shipment finally arrived 4 days later, but the customs authorities initially stubbornly refused to make any start on the process of clearing the water filters through customs.

Fortunately, the head of the “Amurt” organisation (the partner of Kindernothilfe) had excellent contacts with a domestic transport company that speeded up the process. With a great deal of effort, we managed to reduce the clearance time from 21 to 10 days. We kept reiterating that it was only a single non-returnable pallet, but the clocks in this country tick at a rather different rate. Despite the fact that the water filters were declared as relief supplies, we had to pay customs duties on them.

Since my stay in Haiti was limited to a few days, it swiftly became clear that it would be impossible to distribute all 10 filters myself.

Fortunately, I had brought a UJETA “CARE” water filter with me in my luggage as a backup plan. This enabled me to provide training on the device directly without having to wait for the actual delivery.

Kindernothilfe and UJETA “CARE”

In the midst of all these difficulties there are people who devote themselves to the people of this hard-stricken country, especially the children, with enormous dedication and generosity. The team from Kindernothilfe and its partner organisation Amurt are working hand-in-hand in order to give the children in the worst-affected parts in the northwest of the country a way out of their misery.

Traumatised children are given therapy and support through play in the child protection centres run by Kindernothilfe so that they can better process what they experienced during the natural disasters.

I had the special privilege of being allowed to visit one of these child protection centres and experience the work of Kindernothilfe at first hand.

The journey to the northwest of the country was driven in an off-road vehicle, took about six hours and was extremely bumpy and tiring due to the catastrophic state of the roads. I still wonder today just how the off-road vehicle managed to survive the journey.

Thanks to Patrick, our talented driver, we arrived at the staff accommodation near Corridon safe and unharmed.



This is Patrick, probably the best Land Rover driver of all time :-)



Off-road vehicles are an essential



We also encountered a UN patrol

The staff accommodation in which we stayed the night was furnished very simply but practically. Fresh and rested, the next day we continued on to a small village by the name of Corridon.



The village of Corridon in the northwest of Haiti

I was given a warm welcome in the child protection centre there and we immediately set about providing training in the UJETA “CARE” water filter.



The staff were very interested in the water filter, as clean drinking water was a major issue for everyone there.

They dismantled and reassembled the “CARE” with interest and skill, pumped water through it and familiarised themselves under my supervision with the basic function of the device.

They asked a lot of questions and took detailed note of the answers along with their own drawings. I have seldom had the pleasure of training such an interested audience. That's hardly surprising given that what we take for granted in western Europe, having clean drinking water available whenever we want, presents the people there with enormous challenges. Access to clean drinking water is hugely important, especially for the development of the children.



The UJETA “CARE” has a robust design and all the filter elements and individual user parts are stowed away compactly. The 10-litre dirty water container is detachable, and its handle means it can also be used to draw water directly from streams, rivers, lakes, pools - or wherever.

The “CARE” is operated by a hand pump that requires almost no effort at all, making it particularly suitable for children.



UJETA “CARE” water filter





About 3 litres of clean drinking water can be produced with the “CARE” in one minute. In an area where cholera continues to be a live issue, the “CARE” is a reliable partner thanks to its optimally designed filter action. Filtration takes place by means of a sophisticated and certified combination of activated carbon and fine membranes. This ensures that parasites, pathogens, heavy metals and chemical residues can be removed from the water.

Once the staff had been trained in how to use the “CARE”, the children were allowed to have a go with it, and they certainly had fun doing so. They welcomed me and the “CARE” very warmly with singing and dancing.



The children didn't need to be told twice and immediately began to treat and drink water.

They visibly enjoyed the fresh, nice-tasting water, and the delight on the faces of the children filled me with joy and pride!



We have made it our ambition to continue supporting Kindernothilfe in Haiti or in other projects and we look forward to collaborating with them for the sake of humanity.