

Inauguration of the Heinrich A. Litzenroth Memorial Health Center in Sri Lanka.

By Dr. Ulrike Schöneberg, Division Manager GfK Public Affairs (retired), President of Nuremberg Sri Lanka Aid Association

A day of joy and remembrance

March 16, 2010 was a day of mixed emotions as the Heinrich A. Litzenroth Memorial Health Center in Kalmunai on the East coast of Sri Lanka was officially inaugurated. Joy and relief at having finally completed a difficult project merged with feelings of sorrow and remembrance at the motivation for the joint work between Germany and Sri Lanka: the tragic fate of the 230,000 victims of the tsunami in South East Asia on December 26, 2004, including GfK Management Board member Heinrich A. Litzenroth.

Invited by the Mayor of Kalmunai, a party of seven arrived from Nuremberg to take part in the official inauguration ceremony of the health center, taking a few days to explore beforehand. They included the Director of the Office for International Relations, members of the Nuremberg Sri Lanka Aid Association and a Nuremberg TV team.

Arrival: a kaleidoscope of impressions

A day before the inauguration ceremony, the group from Nuremberg made their way to Kalmunai to have a look at the town and the Sainthamaruthu district, in which the health center is based. None of the party had visited this region of Sri Lanka before.



Heinrich A. Litzenroth

was a member of the Management Board of the GfK Group with responsibility for the former Custom Research business division until his death on December 26, 2004. He worked with GfK for 27 years. At the age of 53 he tragically became one of the 230,000 victims of the catastrophic tsunami in South East Asia while holidaying on the Thai island of Khao Lak. GfK's management, colleagues and partners made donations totaling 300,000 Euros in his memory, which went towards building a health and medical clinic in an area particularly devastated by the tsunami. Today, this bears his name: the Heinrich A. Litzenroth Memorial Health Center.



Just two weeks until the doors open: the Heinrich A. Litzenroth Memorial Health Center on the day of its inauguration

A multitude of paradoxical impressions were gathered on the road along the East coast of Sri Lanka: beautiful coastline and seemingly untouched nature was interspersed with Sri Lankan military checkpoints, which have been around for decades and are still very present, although more concealed than in the past. To the left and right, there were the camps and villages erected by Caritas, the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations for tsunami victims and civil war refugees. The journey took the group through villages and towns with bustling streets, small shops, chaotic traffic, unadorned mosques and colorful, elaborately decorated Hindu temples.

After arriving in Kalmunai, the drive to the health center continued alongside the beach for many kilometers, passing destroyed homes, water pumps and boat wreckages. As fishermen are no longer permitted to live close to the beach, the surrounding areas felt like ghost towns.

Mountains of sand had formed on the small road leading from the beach up to the health clinic. Workmen were busy on the roof of the center and people were still milling around inside the building. The windows were being fitted on the top floor, tiles were being laid to complete the unfinished floor and, on the staircase leading to the top floor, the banister was being attached. And all this was supposed to be finished in the next 24 hours? "Of course", asserted Ismail Saleem, the Technical Director from Kalmunai who was responsible for the building of the center. "The roofers, carpenters, floor layers and all other tradesmen will continue working today until everything is finished. Tomorrow we will receive the first furniture deliveries."

Inauguration: remembrance service and community gathering

Ismail Saleem was right. At midday on March 16 the small access road was cleared, the windows in the top floor of the health center were complete, the banister installed. →



Even six years after the devastating tsunami, the beach in Kalmunai is not suitable for tourists



Children from the school opposite ask Dr. Ulrike Schöneberg (m.) questions about the new clinic



Children like this little girl from one of the temporary camps will particularly benefit from the GfK clinic

The yard had been leveled out for the celebration, a stage erected for the guests of honor and rows of chairs set up for the residents of Sainthamaruthu. There was even a canopy and, of course, the obligatory flags waved on the fences and walls. The flag colors showed that the community is not governed by the Sinhalese majority coalition of President

Opened on April 1 this year, the Heinrich A. Litzeroth Memorial Health Center aims to improve the basic outpatient medical care of approximately 30,000 people.

Rajakapase, UPFA, but by the strongest opposition party in the country. For many hours before the ceremony, the community used loudspeakers to call residents in the neighborhood surrounding the health center to join the celebrations. More and more people flocked from all over, and at

the end of the ceremony the yard of the center and the small road in front of it were bustling with people who had come to hear what the guests from Germany and the politicians and authority representatives had to say to them.

Also taking part in the celebrations was Dr. Ismail Fahmy, Technical Adviser of the United Nations Human Settlement Program, UN-HABITAT, in Sri Lanka and supervisor of several projects on the East coast. It is above all as a result of his commitment and integrity that this GfK project was able to be completed so successfully. With just a few words, his speech highlighted why people living in Sainthamaruthu so desperately need this facility: "30,000 people live here, often in unhygienic and very simple living conditions. For more than five years this area of town has not had a doctor or clinic for people to visit when they are ill. The health center financed by GfK employees is therefore major progress towards a return to normal life and a first step in building a better future for this part of Kalmunai."

The health center: refuge and advisory clinic

The Heinrich A. Litzenroth Memorial Health Center, which is only 300 meters from the beach, has green plastered walls and resembles a large villa. A school is located opposite the new building and one of Kalmunai's last ten temporary camps is nearby. For more than five years, a little over 400 families made homeless by the tsunami have been living in this camp in simple huts with corrugated metal roofs, without electricity or adequate sanitary facilities.

The two-storey, 550 square meter building has nothing in common with the technologically advanced hospitals or medical centers in the cities of highly developed economic regions. In fact, the architectural design, materials and colors give it the character of a town house. Opened on April 1 this year, the center aims to improve the basic outpatient medical care of approximately 30,000 people in the district. At the same time, it will also serve as an advisory clinic on hygiene and nutrition for the community.

The Kalmunai district has committed itself to covering the costs for the maintenance and running of the health center as well as appointing doctors, nursing staff and prevention specialists for guidance in hygiene and nutrition. How the doctors could be supported in their future work was the topic of discussions between the party from Nuremberg and representatives of the health authority. Two areas emerged as particularly important: the exchange of information between doctors and health workers and securing grants for providing the clinic with diagnostic equipment and medicines.

Kalmunai: not an idyllic tourist destination

Kalmunai has a population of more than 100,000, primarily Muslims and Tamils, and is the largest town directly on the East coast of Sri Lanka. The livelihoods of most people in the area depend on fishing, trade, craftsmanship and small-scale farming. The tsunami claimed around 4,000 lives and left more than 10,000 families homeless in Kalmunai, making it the most severely affected region in the country.

The Sainthamaruthu district of the town Kalmunai, where the Heinrich A. Litzenroth Memorial Health Center is located, is right next to the Indian Ocean. The fact that the

In memoriam – greeting speech at the clinic opening

I am writing this with tears in my eyes, because losing my father was the greatest loss of my life. My sincere condolences go out to all the people who had to bear misery, due to the devastating natural catastrophe.

The name giver of this hospital, my Dad, Heinrich Litzenroth, was a man who followed his beliefs with great strength, despite all emerging complications. He also had the impressive gift to enjoy his achievements and he taught me to see the good and to retain a positive state of mind.

Therefore, I am very happy that the Heinrich A. Litzenroth Memorial Health Center opens its doors today to help the sick and to improve the lives of those in need. May his positive spirit prevail.

In remembrance of my father, I would like to express my pure gratitude to everybody for this great accomplishment. Thanks to the donors, workers, helpers, planners, cooperators and the many I can't name who helped to make this project possible.

*With true respect,
Esther D. Litzenroth*

residents of Sainthamaruthu are primarily Muslims and that there have not been any violent ethnic conflicts in recent years were key reasons for the decision by the city of Nuremberg and GfK to realize the project at this location. It was also important that the city of Munich was able to secure the involvement of UN-HABITAT, as they coordinated the planning of the center, awarded contracts and supervised the construction.

Since the end of the civil war in May 2009, investments have been made in road works and major tourism projects on the East coast. However, in light of the abundant population, the shortage of areas suitable for construction and the economic and employment structure, the town of Kalmunai does not stand a chance of ever becoming an attractive tourist destination, unlike many other small towns along the East coast of Sri Lanka. It is therefore extremely important that involvement with the Heinrich A. Litzenroth Memorial Health Center, and the people it is helping, continues.



Further information: Corporate Communications
tel. +49 911 395-4440, public.relations@gfk.com