

In 2016, one of our key South Sudanese partners, the Mary Help College in Wau, which trains nurses and midwives, was subject to electronic fraud. £23,000 donated to the College by the Salisbury-Sudan Medical Link was lost, as well as €100,000 donated by a Christian charity in another European country.

We reported the fraud to police, insurers and banking officials in the UK as well as the Charity Commission and Action Fraud. On examining the case, they all considered this to be highly sophisticated electronic fraud carried out by a criminal gang with international reach.

For an idea of the scale and sophistication of the operation, the perpetrators were most likely to have been based in another African country, some distance from South Sudan, yet funds were eventually diverted to a bank account in the Czech Republic.

Between our insurers and some other sources, £18,200 of the £23,000 defrauded from our donation has so far been made good.

After the fraud was discovered, security procedures were tightened at the South Sudanese end and a third attempt at fraud was discovered and prevented. Procedures have also been made stricter at the Salisbury end. An extra authentication factor has been added which we, for obvious reasons, cannot reveal.

People may have noticed that HMRC, many banks in the UK, and even social media sites have added a second authentication factor due to the ever increasing scale of internet fraud. The Chief Constable of Wiltshire recently commented that people were more likely to be hacked and attacked through their laptop via the internet than be attacked on the street.

The Sudan Medical Link has made a series of payments to the Mary Help College over many years, and this is the first time there has been a problem. Indeed, the leadership of the College are accustomed to operating with extraordinarily straitened finances and are used to making the resources they do receive stretch in extraordinary ways. Money sent to the College goes a lot further than it would in the UK.

A representative of the Sudan Medical Link visited to Wau in at the end of February to see four of our students graduating at the end of a three-year course. That makes a total of fourteen nurses and midwives working in South Sudan as a result of the relationship between Salisbury and Mary Help College, with another six students in their final year. Further students will be sponsored to begin training in the current year.

Their skills make an enormous difference in a country where one woman in seven dies in childbirth – the highest rate in the world – and where one child in nine dies before his or her fifth birthday. The Sudan Medical Link really is saving lives in South Sudan.