



# Uganda 11 - 25 April, 2026

From Patient Care to Sustainable Partnership

## Team

Plastic surgeon and team leader  
Anaesthetist  
Anaesthesiology Resident  
Anaesthetic nurse  
Theatre nurse

## Visited hospitals

Corstiaan Breugem (report)  
Marc Simon  
Vincent van Cuilenborg  
Sonja Verbij  
Marije Kruisselbrink  
**Mulago Hospital**  
**Lira Hospital**



Also in the picture  
Helma Hofland, Myrthe  
Simon and Darinka  
Breugem

***"We travelled 13 hours by bus to get here. I am so grateful that you have changed my son's life."***

These were the words of Gabriel's father shortly after his son underwent cleft lip surgery at Mulago National Referral Hospital in Kampala. For this family, reaching the hospital required an arduous journey across Uganda. For Gabriel, it meant the opportunity for a brighter future.

**His father's words perfectly captured the purpose of our mission**





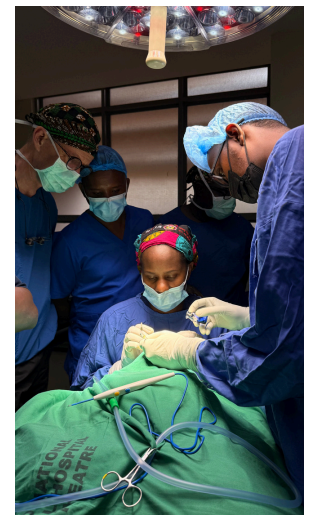
**From 11 to 24 April 2026**, a team from Interplast Holland visited Uganda to provide patient care, strengthen local partnerships and explore opportunities for long-term collaboration in cleft, craniofacial and reconstructive surgery.

While surgery formed an important part of the visit, the mission's primary objective was broader: to understand the needs and priorities of local surgical teams, identify hospitals with the facilities and staff to support safe cleft and craniofacial surgery, and explore how Interplast Holland can contribute to sustainable capacity building in a way that responds to local needs and priorities.



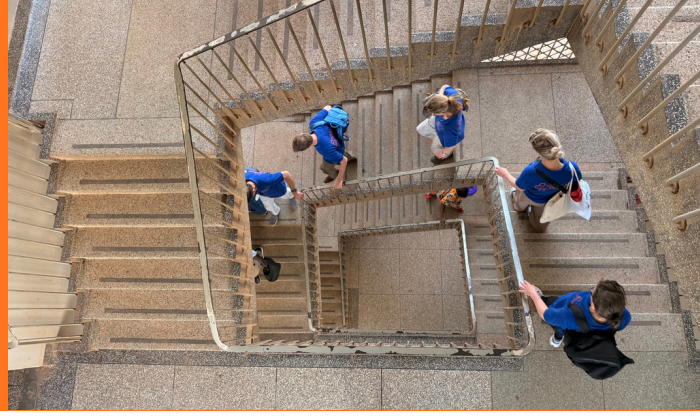
The first part of the mission took place at Mulago National Referral Hospital in Kampala, Uganda's largest teaching and referral hospital. In the weeks preceding our arrival, the local surgical team, including Ugandan plastic surgeons Dr Joel Wandabwa and Dr Irene Asaba, had been screening and selecting patients with cleft lips and palates from across the region. Particularly striking was a group of sixteen patients who had travelled together from northwestern Uganda in the hope of receiving treatment.

The scale of unmet need became immediately apparent. Despite a preliminary screening by Dr. Wandabwa and Dr. Asaba, more patients presented than could be treated within the available time. Some children were too young to undergo surgery safely, while others required nutritional rehabilitation before an operation could be considered.



Nevertheless, a great deal was accomplished. Ten cleft procedures were performed at Mulago: five cleft lip repairs and five cleft palate repairs. All operations were carried out in close collaboration with Joel and Irene. While providing clinical care is important, the longer-term impact of these visits depends on what local teams take forward themselves, and these joint operating sessions offered valuable opportunities for mutual learning and the exchange of expertise.

The enthusiasm and commitment of the local teams were inspiring and highlighted the strong foundation already present within Uganda.



Beyond the operating theatre, extensive discussions took place on the future of cleft and craniofacial care in Uganda. Particular attention was given to anaesthesia and perioperative care for young children. The visit revealed the presence of **skilled paediatric anaesthesiologists** at Mulago whose involvement in future missions could significantly strengthen the safety and quality of care. Future collaboration may also include training in regional anaesthesia techniques and postoperative pain management, areas with significant potential to improve patient safety and outcomes.

### The second part of the mission brought the team to Lira Regional Referral Hospital in Northern Uganda.

Here we were welcomed by Dr Titus Opegu, plastic surgeon and one of the driving forces behind reconstructive surgical care in the region, with whom Interplast Holland has built a close and enduring working relationship over the years. Where previous missions had taken us to Kumi, Dr Opegu's home base, this visit was an opportunity to assess whether the facilities at Lira Regional Referral Hospital are suited to providing cleft and craniofacial care for young infants. In this patient group, the conditions surrounding the operating theatre matter as much as those within it. Reliable monitoring and the availability of staff with experience in paediatric and neonatal care are essential prerequisites for safe anaesthesia and surgery. The team was encouraged to find that Lira Regional Referral Hospital meets these requirements, and that local staff showed a genuine willingness to further develop their skills in this area.



Titus with father Marc- and daughter Myrthe Simon

## The complete Lira team



With these requirements in mind, Dr Opegu, together with local physicians and hospital staff, had ensured that patients were already partially screened and a preliminary selection made of those who might be candidates for surgery during the camp. The willingness of all staff to contribute to patient care and to learn was remarkable.

As in Kampala, the demand for specialized care proved substantial. Patients presented with cleft lip and palate, craniofacial anomalies, burn contractures and other complex reconstructive conditions.

Twelve surgical procedures were performed, including cleft repairs, burn contracture releases and a **rare Tessier 6 facial cleft** reconstruction.

Equally important were discussions with local healthcare providers regarding future training opportunities, service development and collaborative research.



**Tessier 6 facial cleft,  
before and after  
surgery**

What struck the team was not only the quality of the facilities, but the dedication and ambition of the local staff. For patients in this part of Uganda, far from the capital, access to specialised surgical care remains limited, and Lira feels like a place where a lasting partnership can genuinely take root.

# Building Capacity Through Education

Following the clinical mission, the team travelled to Kumi for the annual **Basics of Burn Care Course**, organized by MIDAS Touch Medical Services, Interplast Holland and Global Surgery Amsterdam.

This course has become one of the clearest examples of sustainable capacity building within Interplast Holland's activities.

Perhaps the most inspiring story was that of Dr Titus Opegu. When the first Basics of Burn Care Course was organized in 2022, Titus participated as a surgical resident. Four years later, he returned as Course Director, leading the program himself.



His journey perfectly illustrates what long-term investment in education and mentorship can achieve. We are immensely proud of his growth and leadership.

The course welcomed **52 healthcare professionals** from Uganda and Kenya, representing 18 healthcare institutions. Participants included nurses, doctors, clinical officers and medical students involved in burn care. The educational impact was substantial. Average test scores increased from **59.6% before** the course to **81.9% afterwards**, reflecting a significant improvement in knowledge and confidence.



The success of the course was made possible through the dedication of many individuals. We would particularly like to acknowledge **Myrthe Simon**, whose tireless efforts in preparation, coordination and evaluation were instrumental to the course's success. We are equally grateful to **Tess Robinson**, whose organizational support and commitment greatly enhanced the learning experience for both faculty and participants.

The course also attracted interest from other institutions. Both Kiruddu National Referral Hospital and Kumi expressed interest in hosting future editions, while colleagues from Kenya explored possibilities for implementing the program within their own healthcare systems.

**These developments reinforce our belief that education and capacity building may ultimately impact far more patients than any individual surgical mission.**



## Ear Reconstruction and Surgical Training

Following the burn care course, we returned to Kampala.

At Mulago National Referral Hospital, **a complex autologous ear reconstruction** was performed using rib cartilage in a young woman who had lost her ear following trauma. The procedure was carried out together with Dr Joel Wandabwa and Dr Irene Asaba.

In addition to surgery, teaching sessions were provided to plastic surgery residents and discussions were held with hospital leadership regarding future collaboration in cleft, craniofacial and reconstructive surgery.

Throughout the mission it became increasingly clear that the need for sustainable training, mentorship and academic collaboration is as great as the need for surgery itself.

## Looking Forward

Six weeks after the mission had ended, we received a message from Jackline, the young woman who had undergone ear reconstruction.

*“Good evening Doctor. This is Jackline Nabatanzi from Uganda, the patient on whom you reconstructed an ear at Mulago National Hospital. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and your team for bringing back hope into my life. I had started to lose hope because I did not have the means to travel outside my country for this surgery. When you heard my cry, you answered. May God continue to bless you and use you to bring hope to people who have lost their self-esteem and confidence.”*

Her words remind us why we do this work. Behind every operation is a person. Behind every patient is a family. And behind every partnership lies the opportunity to strengthen an entire healthcare system.

This mission confirmed the substantial need for cleft care, craniofacial surgery, reconstructive surgery and burn care within Uganda. It also demonstrated the presence of highly motivated local leaders who are committed to improving care for their patients.

The partnerships with Dr Joel Wandabwa, Dr Irene Asaba, Dr Titus Opegu and many others dedicated healthcare professionals provide a strong foundation for the future.



On Friday afternoon, the team had the opportunity to visit Kiruddu Hospital and its burns unit. I took advantage of this occasion to give a lecture to the residents in attendance. Many of them are familiar faces, as we have known each other for quite some time through our weekly Zoom meetings and previous visits.

### Residents in Kiruddu Hospital

Based on the findings of this mission, Interplast Holland will work together with its Ugandan partners to develop a multi-year collaboration plan focused on patient care, education, research and capacity building.

Our shared goal is clear: to help develop sustainable local expertise, ensuring that increasing numbers of patients gain access to safe, timely and high-quality reconstructive surgical care close to home.

**We look forward with confidence to this next chapter of our partnership.**



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Day 1/2 🇳🇬

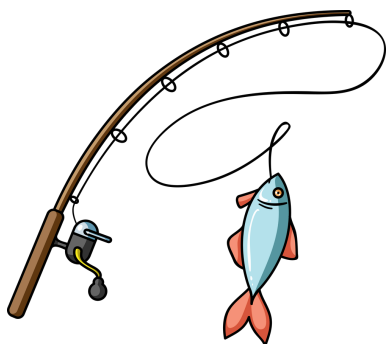
**MULAGO NATIONAL REFERRAL HOSPITAL**  
 Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery Unit  
 in collaboration with Interplast Holland.

**FREE CLEFT LIP / PALATE SURGERY**  
 at Mulago National Referral Hospital, Block B, Level 2  
 Plastic Surgery Unit

Date: 13th - 14th April 2026

Before → After

For more information Contact: +256 753 044741 / +256 783 988248



Let's teach how to fish.....