

SYNOPSIS:

BAD AIR

By William DANIELS

Uganda - Burkina Faso - Burma - Thailand - India - Sierra Leone

Malaria – literally “bad air” – is a disease which has afflicted mankind since Ancient Times. For a long time, people believed that this fever was caused by the fetid air given off by swamps. It is in fact the bite from a mosquito, the female of the anopheles species, which multiply in stagnant water which transmit the parasite responsible for the disease.

Eradicated in France at the beginning of the twentieth century, malaria is one of the deadliest and least controlled epidemics in the world. It above all strikes at the most vulnerable: pregnant women, small children and displaced populations. Every 30 seconds a child of less than five years of age dies of malaria in sub-Saharan Africa and every year one to three million people in the world die from the disease. Africa is by far the most afflicted continent by this disease with 80 percent of all malaria deaths occurring in sub-Saharan Africa. But many other tropical countries are also affected, notably in Southeast Asia.

In order to witness the ravages of malaria, William Daniels has travelled across several countries and continents. He first of all visited Uganda to cover the campaigns for mass distribution of disinfected mosquito nets among people who have been displaced by 20 years of war which the country has lived through. Then he went to Burkina Faso to photograph actions to raise awareness among very poor populations, who are illiterate and often ignorant of the disease. Next he reached the border between Burma and Thailand, right where the jungle is infested by mosquitoes and where the parasite is most resistant. The Karen, who are at war with the Burmese junta, have few means available to protect themselves from malaria. Health facilities are practically non-existent and they secretly cross the frontier to go and get treatment in Thailand. William then reached Calcutta, a megalopolis which is considered to be India's malaria capital, because in this urban jungle where 4 million Indians live in slums the anopheles proliferates in the monsoon season when the city is submerged in floodwater. William finally travelled to Sierra Leone, a country nicknamed the white man's grave because many Europeans died from acute malaria in the Sierra Leone jungle. Today the disease is still the main cause of mortality, claiming an estimated 100,000 victims each year, mostly children of under five years of age.