Eritrea has a population of more than 6 million and most recent evidence suggests that the prevalence of blindness in the country may be among the highest rates in sub-Saharan Africa. Cataract is the cause of 55% of blindness, making it the leading cause of visual impairment in Eritrea. Trachoma, a severe and infectious eye disease, is endemic in 22 out of Eritrea’s 58 sub-regions.

HCP first came to Eritrea in 2019, helping cure blindness at a cataract surgical outreach. At no cost to the patients, HCP, in coordination with the Federal Health Ministry, performed 1,320 cataract surgeries while also providing exposure and skills transfer for ophthalmic teams during the high-volume cataract campaign method. The outreach brought together ophthalmic teams from three continents with a shared purpose of restoring sight of the needlessly blind.

In 2023, HCP returned to perform the country’s first corneal transplant. HCP Cureblindness and the Eritrean Berhan Ayny Hospital team restored 1103 sights (+ more than 300 2nd opinion consults). In addition, four successful corneal transplants were performed.

HCP Cureblindness has a dedicated team in West Africa working collaboratively with local partners and governments.

ONE BRAVE BOY
Story and Photographs by Christopher Briscoe

The little boy sits in an endless line of cataract patients. Dr. Menghis Bairu, a volunteer now living in California, approaches the boy, kneels down in front of him, lowers his blue surgical mask, and begins speaking to him softly in Tigrigna. “What neighborhood are you from? - Really, me too! - What sports do you like? - Soccer? Me too!”

The boy’s tense body relaxes as he gazes into the doctor’s kind eyes.

Moments later, the head surgical nurse takes the boy’s hand and leads him to the operating rooms. The boy listens to the nurse describe the procedure, but can’t imagine enduring a two-inch needle inserted into his eye socket. He dissolves into tears and leaves the operating room, weeping in his father’s arms.

Minutes later he is back up on the table with his new best friend, Menghis, who is promising him an energy bar afterwards. A nurse drapes a sterile cloth over his little body. Nurse James and Menghis hold his head tightly while James inserts the needle alongside the eye.

Dr. Sadik’s eyes narrow as he peers through his microscope. His experienced gloved hands quickly go to work.

The boy’s eye, now ready to heal itself without stitches, was pressure bandaged with a large ball of cotton. The brave boy’s other eye opens. He doesn’t understand what has just happened, but he is happy to be helped off the table, still holding fast to Menghis, who gently lifts him up with his loving arms and carries him down the long hallway, crowded as always on both sides with waiting patients.

The bravest boy’s story is only beginning. He tells Menghis that he couldn’t wait to go back to school. Menghis then asked, “And what do you want to be when you grow up?”

“I want to be an Ophthalmologist.”
WHY WE HELP
For millions of people, blindness is treatable. Unfortunately, 90% of people suffering from vision loss live in low- and middle-income countries where a solution isn’t available. Without care, blindness dramatically affects individuals, their families and their communities.

- Blind children are more likely to die in childhood than children with good vision, especially in low-income countries.\textsuperscript{5}
- Vision loss is linked to social exclusion more broadly, including the experience of negative attitudes, violence and bullying, sexual assault, and loneliness.\textsuperscript{6}
- The restoration of sight helps break the cycle of poverty and inequity.\textsuperscript{7} Studies show that as many as 90% of blind individuals in poor communities cannot work.\textsuperscript{8} 55% of the world’s blind are women - and 90% of women who are blind are living in poverty.\textsuperscript{9}
- Sight helps people learn. Children can learn twice as much when they see clearly.\textsuperscript{10}

HOW WE HELP
HCP’s approach to eye care is unique—it focuses on building local capacity, ensuring quality infrastructure and equipment are available, enabling quality patient care and aiding effective prevention. We provide training and equipment to healthcare professionals, who then go on to provide eye care services in their own communities. This action-based approach builds local leadership, empowers key actors, and develops sustainable practices from the ground up.

WHERE WE STARTED
Founded in 1995 in Nepal by Dr. Geoff Tabin and Dr. Sanduk Ruit on their dream to end needless blindness in the world, HCP Cureblindness today provides critical eye care services, training for ophthalmic professionals, and enhanced eye care infrastructure where they are needed most.

OUR VISION
We envision a world in which no person is needlessly blind.

OUR MISSION
We enable countries to cure needless blindness by developing high-quality, cost-effective eye care in underserved areas of the world.