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## Children's champion Dr Tshering Lama back in Newcastle to promote award-winning movie

A Northumbria University graduate returned to Newcastle to promote an internationally acclaimed film, *SOLD*, which tells the story of a teenage girl who is trafficked from her home in rural Nepal to a brothel in India.

Dr Tshering Lama came to Northumbria in 2002 to take a degree course in health development studies. He was the first student from the Hyolmo ethnic group in Nepal to go to a British university. He stayed on to take a MA in public health and then a PhD in tele-medicine to improve healthcare in

remote parts of his home country by linking people to medical experts for advice.

Dr Lama, 33, is now the director of the independent child rights organisation Childreach Nepal and was back in the North East to show a film at Northumbria which tells the harrowing story of child trafficking in his country.

SOLD stars X-Files actress Gillian Anderson and is not due to be released in the UK until next year. After the private screening at the large lecture theatre in City Campus East SOLD's Oscar-winning director Jeffrey D. Brown and Producer Jane Charles joined the audience via video link from the US to discuss how the film is being used by Dr Lama and others in the global fight against modern day slavery.

The special screening of SOLD at the University was to raise funds for Childreach Nepal. After the earthquakes struck Nepal in April, killing over 7,000 people, Dr Lama and his team have worked tirelessly reaching over 10,000 people with life-saving supplies and enabling 4,000 children to return to education.

SOLD, which tells the story of a thirteen-year-old girl named Lakshmi who is trafficked from Nepal to an Indian brothel, opened last year's London Indian Film Festival in July and went on to win the festival's audience award, the fourth top award it has received thus far.

An extraordinary tale of survival, the film is executive produced by multi Oscar-winning actress Emma Thompson and is based on the best-selling novel of the same name by Patricia McCormick. It shines a light on the fate that many girls face after being trafficked from Nepal under false promises of employment.

Four months on from when the first earthquake hit Nepal Dr Lama warned that the widespread loss of facilities like schools and housing was leaving even more children in rural areas vulnerable to the child traffickers.

"Re-building the classrooms is important for us," he said. "We've done all of the disaster response work; humane and medical, but we need to look after our children. We've given ourselves six months to build 100 classrooms in an

area of Nepal that will hopefully act as a blueprint for other charitable organisations to follow.

“We need to provide children and their families with a comfortable and safe environment at a time when they’re extremely vulnerable to child traffickers. The school will act as a community and health centre for parents, as well as children, to access. We were already experiencing child trafficking in Nepal before the earthquake; as many as 20,000 in a year. If children are in school they are 80% less likely to be trafficked.

“Our aim is to re-build the classrooms and provide girl-friendly toilets. More than 70% of girls drop out of school in Nepal when they reach puberty because they don’t have a toilet. We want to work with anti-trafficking organisations, going from village to village to discuss with parents and children the reality of trafficking. We want to introduce proper teacher training and re-design the curriculum so that children learn about the dangers of trafficking.”

While at Northumbria University, Tshering earned a Millennium Award for his volunteering activities and was presented with the first Northumbria University Lord Glenamara International Scholarship, which allowed him to carry on with his studies.

He added: “Northumbria gave me a wonderful platform to unlock my own potential and has given me the knowledge and skills to go back to Nepal and unlock other children’s potentials. I come back to Northumbria every time I visit the UK because it will always be like a home to me.”

To donate to Childreach Nepal’s earthquake appeal, go to [www.childreach.org.uk/nepal-appeal](http://www.childreach.org.uk/nepal-appeal)

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