

# SPEECH

**FXB** international  
François-Xavier Bagnoud



## **The Dedication of the François-Xavier Bagnoud Building at the Harvard School of Public Health**

Boston, Massachusetts, 2 October 1996

**By Albina du Boisrouvray, Founder and President**

I spoke a short while ago to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi – the Burmese patriot and Nobel Peace Prize winner – who is a member of the Advisory Board of the François-Xavier Bagnoud Center for Health and Human Rights and she sends all her best wishes for today and her full support for the François-Xavier Bagnoud Center for Health and Human Rights. She planned to record a message and to send it to us. But since last Friday she has been blockaded by troops and her telephone line disconnected. But she is well and determined. Her husband Michael Aris wrote that "for the last eight years and more there have been recurrent surges of hope and fear. I think Suu is learning to treat those two impostors of Triumph and Disaster just the same. She will stay the course, come what may."

And we should have a special thought for her today.

Very few of you here today actually knew François – so let me tell you about him. And some must wonder why we did all this – the building – the center – the chair – and why here. François was always smiling and very luminous like the photograph of him that hangs in this atrium in front of the helicopter. He was very giving and very caring. And extremely considerate of others.

His passion was flying and rescuing. Professionally he made about 300 rescue missions, most of them medical – often taking high risks. In the Valais, Switzerland, to this day, people come and talk to me, remembering him as a blond angel landing with his helicopter to rescue here a pregnant woman, there a badly injured skier, or someone who had to be rushed to hospital for an emergency. They remember him searching for lost people in the mountains and rescuing them from death in freezing blizzards on the glaciers. These people have tears on their cheeks; they remember that he had been part of important times of their lives. They share our pain.

When François-Xavier was a child, he wanted to pass every rescue test you can think of and he did, Red Cross, swimming, first-aid. He had spun a large network of friends around the world of all generations. I don't know how he managed with all the work he had, but always he was there for them when they needed him. I feel very privileged to have lived 24 years with such a loving, deeply caring, happy human being.

Often when I think of him and of all the things we have been doing in his name throughout these years, a title of William Saroyan comes to my mind: "Sons Come and Go, Mothers Stay on Forever". I then think of many mothers around the world, the indestructible, relentless mothers in suffering: the Argentinean mothers; the Sarajevo mothers who between them, lost 20,000 children in the war. I remember a specific relentless loving mother in a Kiev Hospital in 1995, Diedok Svetlanna Vassilneyevna, nursing her two dying children, Maxime, 2 years old and Artyum, 10 months, both dying of leukemia and pneumonia, the drastic health consequences of the leaking of a nuclear plant.

And there is no word in any language that I know of, and a word should be found, to designate such mothers or fathers. Losing parents, one is an orphan; a spouse, you are a widow. What are you when you have lost your children? I am one of those nameless mothers who stay on relentlessly and do not die. As Ulysses' mother did. Homer tells us that while Ulysses was away on his endless voyage, his mother died, and when he returned, he went to an oracle, wanting to know what she died from. And Homer tells us, that through the oracle his mother said to him "It was no disease that made me pine away, but I missed you so much, and your clever wit, and your happy merry ways, life was sweet no longer, so I died." After François came and went, life was sweet no longer, so the closest circle of his network, his family and best friends, we set out to extend the flow of love from him to us and us to him, to the children of the world. And to relentlessly continue his spirit of caring and rescuing, so that his generous presence, the smile, the shining light would not be lost and gone forever, and life could be a little bit sweet again, through the smile of a rescued child, the well-being of the most destitute, or a mission like the one that is housed in this building.

With new friends that we met along the road, and who cared also, we continued to knit the network. Allying ourselves in the field with those who have the greatest impact. All that is where this building comes from, and the center and the chair that it houses. At FXB, as we sometimes call the association and foundation François Xavier Bagnoud, we continue in the field of humanitarian assistance, his mission of rescue. Whether it be the HIV+ orphaned abandoned children in Thailand, Colombia, Brazil, India, or Washington, D.C.; sexually exploited girls and young women in Thailand and Burma; or the enslaved children in forced labor in Pakistan and India. We take care of one street boy from Guatemala City and of several thousands on the slum streets of Montevideo.

François-Xavier Bagnoud Association has come to the rescue of orphans of AIDS and of the war in Uganda and Rwanda. And in France and Switzerland, we have created innovative programs of palliative care so that terminally sick patients of all ages can die at home in dignity and with love.

We seek to extend the very special rescue work of our friends and allies – people like Dr. Jim Oleske and Nurse Mary Boland who bring their precious knowledge and their tender loving care from their long experience in the community of AIDS-afflicted families in Newark, New Jersey, to others all around the world. We do this through the François-Xavier Bagnoud International HIV+ Training program for nurses, doctors, social workers, fighting AIDS in the most vulnerable and disadvantaged communities. In 1988, I didn't know Dr. Jonathan Mann, but I knew of him. To me he was a warrior fighting against AIDS at large, standing for health and human rights, committed to rescue the discriminated, the most destitute, and the most vulnerable ones. I pursued him and caught him. He needed a tool: The GLOBAL AIDS POLICY COALITION. We gave it to him and he led us to Harvard where he was teaching.

There we met new friends, new allies, Dean Harvey Fineberg of the Harvard School of Public Health who wanted a chair of health and human rights for Dr. Jonathan Mann. I needed an instrument of some sort to defend all children in suffering and in sickness and to globally defend their rights at an international level, because I physically simply couldn't continue to do it piecemeal all over the planet catering to the endless needs and suffering that I encountered in the world, trying to shake up governments and agencies, one by one. So with the visionary Dean of the School of Public Health of this great university and with the very remarkable and special person who is Dr. Jonathan Mann – Jonathan whom I have been admiring for nearly ten years and who carries what I consider one of the most important missions of our time, putting his useful thinking and research on the link and interaction between health and human rights into action and advocacy, – we created the François-Xavier Bagnoud Center for the Health and Human Rights with a special attention to children.

This new building represents rescue in the largest sense of the term. As W. Foege says "Every problem is a public health problem and it is our job to be indignant on behalf of everybody".

We are unfortunately swamped by places of indignation. China which is one fourth of our world population is using sophisticated medical technology, sonograms to detect girl fetuses, so as to abort their mothers. In India, there are 940 million people trapped in a cast system of discrimination that will be the center of the AIDS epidemic in a few years, and where there will not be one Indian who will not know someone of his or her extended family who is not HIV+. Or closer to us, the child labor in Europe and the United States where there has never been so many children in the agriculture and textile industry since the Great Depression. All the children in Europe who work in shoe factories, are in great risk of health because of the glue. All the health problems of environmental racism. And the hundreds of millions of children in forced labor all around the world deprived of the fundamental right to health and childhood.

I hope the François-Xavier Bagnoud Building of the Harvard School of Public Health will network, not only with the resources within, the people, the centers, but outside, with the other schools and with the neighborhood, so that it is a pattern of ecotones of very soft edges intensifying rich interaction: I find a University to be a very eloquent example of what ecologists call ecotones: It is an edge where different intellectual, social and urban environments join. A soft over-lapping of very different regions to take the poetic words of Sim Van der Ryn and Stuart Cowan: "Like patches of water color on wet paper, different regions intermingle in an ecotone, to create a new spectrum of colors. Ecotones are highly permeable, they are the opposite of a hard edge or a boundary that presents a barrier to the flow of resources, energy, or communication. They are places of maximum productivity and diversity. By allowing ecotones rather than hard edges, we intensify interaction and facilitate the flow of materials, energy, and information that can catalyze self-designing processes."

I hope that with this building, it will never be forgotten that Health and Human Rights are intimately linked to the health of our environment in the beautiful way that Sim Van der Ryn says it: "We must honor the small acts of compassion required to care for our planet."

And I make the wish that François-Xavier Bagnoud who was meant to do an MBA at Harvard in '87, in a future that was never to be, will not be remembered only as the posthumous donor of a public health building, but that his name with this building will become synonymous of a commitment, of a mission of solidarity in health, a responsibility to rescue from abandonment, exploitation, lovelessness, abuse, and vulnerability, so that we can reverse Saroyan's title to " mothers come and go, sons stay on forever," children stay on forever, whispering to us the beautiful thoughts of the Native American poet Joy Harjo:

"I believe love is the strongest force in the world, though it doesn't often appear to be so at the ragged end of our century and its appearance in places of drought from lovelessness is always startling."

Amidst the lovelessness, the health drought that is AIDS, poverty, vulnerability, abuse of our children and of our planet, may the François-Xavier Bagnoud Building of the Harvard School of Public Health be a relentless, startling beacon of love.