



International Institute of Children's Rights

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By Albina du Boisrouvray, Founder and President

Mr. Comby, President of the University Kurt Bosch

Mr. Zermatten, Director of the International Institute of Children's Rights and all of your fellow workers

Professor Manciaux, Course Director

Ladies and Gentlemen taking part in this seminar,

Dear Friends,

During the United Nations Special Session in New York in May 2002, our friends from the IDE: Bernard Comby, Jean Zermatten, Paola Riva Gapany and ourselves highlighted the unbelievable fact that a small mountainous canton located in a small country is host to two institutions that are champions for the cause of children's rights

We told ourselves that the Canton of Valais should become the Capital of Children's Rights.

We decided to join forces and to use our combined resources and skills, for this endeavor, as often as possible.

It is for this reason that I have the honor of speaking to you today, as we come to the end of this week dedicated to Orphan's Rights and vulnerable children that HIV/AIDS has left in its wake.

I founded the Association François-Xavier Bagnoud in 1989, 3 years after the death of my son, François-Xavier Bagnoud, a rescue helicopter pilot whose life was a model of generosity and compassion.

Together with his close family and friends, we wished to perpetuate his passion for rescue work by putting it to work in a larger extent by taking up the forgotten causes of the forgotten people in forgotten countries.

You must have realized throughout the seminary, and having listened or spoken with my assistants, (Remigious Bekunda from Uganda, Africa, (Dr. Anil Purohit) from Asia, (Dr. Alejandro Haag) from Latin America, (Christine Eggs and Christophe Bagnoud) from Europe, that FXB is not only an efficient development organization but also a culture that has been put into action.

I think that this is one of the key points of its long term success.

This culture was already in place before I founded FXB. First by being a militant who wanted to change the world through ideologies like the university movements of that time and the will to share was at its core.

Then later in the seventies, Mohammed Yunus, with his Grameen Bank, taught us that the poorest women were trustworthy creditors who reimbursed 98% of the loans that Grameen provided as opposed to the American farmers who only reimbursed 77% of their loans.

Therefore, one could trust and rely on the most deprived women of the planet.

Then, during those same years, I accompanied then worked with Bernard Kouchner who, with Mario Bettati, set up the right and the duty to get involved – that is to come to the aid of those who call on us without waiting for their governments to take the first step.

I went a step further because of AIDS, invisible and silent, I led FXB to approach those who were in need and who were unable to ask for help for themselves and – the 4th ingredient of this culture: the lessons that were taught to us by Dr. Jonathan Mann at the end of the eighties about the inextricable link between Health and Human Rights : that means that there cannot be politics or lasting public health programs if the people concerned do not have access to their social and economical rights – AIDS is a clear representative of this problem – and that Jonathan Mann and his assistants easily proved in the two publications of “AIDS in the World”.

It is at Harvard University, in the Public Health Faculty located in the François-Xavier Bagnoud Center, that research on Health and Human rights where Dr. Mann - Research leader – wrote, conducted research, and taught for several years.

These basic rights are: education, protection against physical, mental and sexual violence and against all types of exploitations and care. These rights are all totally ignored – instead children are treated with contempt. AIDS is not only a medical crisis but also a social crisis that accelerates transgressions and pushes back even further the access to basic rights.

Poverty – that is in fact the first violation of Human Rights – underdevelopment, illiteracy and stigmatization are the main factor of the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Yet, mankind does not understand and does not put into action the inextricable link that exists between Health and Human Rights, nor the way in which this link, when it's taken into consideration and respected, is a powerful tool capable of eradicating poverty. We do exactly the opposite, we allow – by pure negligence – exclusion, lack of education and misery to thrive. This unhealthy climate engenders social damage such as instability and insecurity that by themselves are at the root of wars and terrorist acts.

Poverty and health form vicious circle that is impossible to break. Education and the autonomy of women are the first step to reconquer these basic rights and the tool to break this vicious circle.

The inextricable links between Health and Human Rights are at the heart of our global strategy to fight AIDS, poverty and to rescue the orphans and vulnerable children that the pandemic leaves in its wake.

From the start I wanted to concentrate FXB activities on AIDS orphans, affected or infected with the virus. At the time, no treatment, not even AZT existed. We opened FXB houses in the US, in Thailand and, later, in India, Colombia and Brazil. These houses reflect the concept of Tender Loving Care: the conviction – and the proof later – that these orphan

children, HIV-positive or sick with AIDS will have a longer and better quality of life if they are welcome in a family framework, surrounded with love, support and receiving individualized care.

When I started my work in Africa in 1990, there were already hundreds of thousands orphans and we did not know who was infected or not. On this continent, for cultural and financial reasons, but above all faced with this large number of children alone and living in extreme poverty, our traditional concept of small FXB houses would not work, we had to come up with something else.

I decided at first to start an FXB program in Uganda that followed in the footsteps of a project that was started by President and Janet Museveni to fight AIDS in their country.

With François' father – who is co-president of FXB – and who had worked in Africa, we walked a lot and questioned the village people of Semuto in the province of Luweero, where we had decided to give our support.

We spent a considerable amount of time in the villages, sitting with their leaders and the grandparents, tired but fighting to raise the orphans. With the help of our interpreter, I asked them: "How can we help you?" We spoke of FXB values and of our methods: Love, family, dignity, health, education, food, fight against the spread of AIDS: Basic human rights.

We shared and exchanged ideas. The dialogue between Uganda and Europe lasted 18 months. This is what came out: "If Glenda had a cow, she could have milk and sell what is left over" – If Janet had seeds, she could grow vegetables and the children would be better fed". – If Alice had a little store, she would have the means to take in another orphan – because Africa has this wealth of the extended family.

This is how we initiated our first program in Africa to rescue AIDS orphans and vulnerable children: by providing direct help to the families and communities who care for them.

Innovation : The investment in the society, in the community, not by individual loan to people who have been pushed well below poverty level from \$1 to \$2 daily to .60 cents a day or less.

Access to Income Generating Activities (IGA) is the main core of the community support provided by FXB to foster families caring for the orphans.

Small income generating activity that is adapted to its environment, IGA must cover the basic needs of these families. The motivation, state of health (most are infected with the virus, widowers or widows or very elderly), and the beneficiary's skills, are the determining elements in the type of IGA enterprise.

We can cite as an example, the raising of animals, such as poultry, cattle, pigs and vegetable growing in rural areas. Weaving or sewing in urban areas. We provide the necessary elements for the start of the project – on average \$125 or Euros – and we ensure the follow up of the beneficiary families.

We later repeated this method in Rwanda and in South Africa by taking the culture and needs specific to each country.

I just love listening to a beneficiary say : I rejoined the Association François-Xavier Bagnoud in 1992, 1995 or 2000". "I rejoined " : It's a very gratifying expression that recognizes the induction of a beneficiary into an active, positive and self-worth producing movement that also involves being included into the extended FXB family.

This means, in a spirit of sharing, to give them this aid, not as a loan, but as we give a hand to rescue someone from drowning, or who falls into a pit – to pull that person out of there and to position her on a diving board – from where she can take a running jump on her own.

From there on, our beneficiaries are able to fit into the local economical framework or to take out a type of loan such as micro credits.

I consider this starting donation as an investment in a society in which the beneficiaries give back more valuable results by raising the next generation and I call for micro-economics studies to be conducted in order to show proof of the success of this kind of project with their governments.

Since I built this Association with my own money, I was able to remain independent, free to work in a manner which seemed for the best, by using my empathy, my good sense and with the spirit of sharing.

Today, we have spent my own funds and we depend on donations to keep providing the financial support needed for our projects and to start new projects modeled on previous and very successful ones. These go to prove that good results can be obtained when we are determined to promote and to put into action these extricable links.

India, a country that represents one sixth of the world population, is facing huge challenges to stop the spread of AIDS – which has been increasing at a catastrophic rate, especially among the migrant population. Officially, there is close to 5 million person infected with the AIDS virus, but it's obvious that there are many forgotten or hidden ways to transmit the disease, and in my opinion the reality is 5 to 6 times greater than the official number.

We need to urgently support the Indian population in their endeavor to inform and to remove stigmatization in order to avoid a great number of orphans and a catastrophic situation such as the one found in Africa.

FXB aims to participate in the fight against the spread of the virus by leading – in all of the 35 States and Territories of the Indian Union – programs of prevention through information, education and communication and also by establishing centers for voluntary HIV testing and psychosocial support.

In India as in many other countries, the FXB mission is to rescue AIDS orphans. This whole strategy of prevention that we have initiated will help to decrease the number of expected AIDS orphans.

We are also developing the concept of community reinsertion that we have been leading in Africa for the last 13 years in order to avoid that thousands of AIDS orphans be placed in orphanages and increase the ranks of street children. The orphanage solution is very widely used in Indian in answer to the needs of orphan and abandoned children.

The convention of The Rights of the Child – ratified by all the countries in the world except the United States – the most powerful government in the world - and Somalia – that does not have a government – states a legal obligation to put it into action. Yet, almost nothing has changed in 14 years for the majority of children of our world that has 6 billion inhabitants, of which 2 billion are under 14 years of age. Particularly for AIDS orphans, orphans from other causes and street children, this enormous children population from our global village abandoned by the adults

The Association François-Xavier Bagnoud leads 90 programs – including 156 different activities – in 17 countries.

But we are only mending some of the numerous holes in our global village's social security net, through which children slip every day to fall into barbaric conditions.

What can the children do to survive when they have nobody to love them, raise them, feed them, protect them? – they are the ideal prey for drug trafficking people, prostitutions networks and they increase the ranks of child – soldiers.

In West Africa, a rebel commander stated that a 12-year-old child is a perfect soldier. Old enough to carry an AK42, to understand and to execute an order, but too young to have scruples when facing terrorist acts of human destruction.

In Sierra Leone, Ibrahim, a young boy who became a soldier at 8 years of age and nicknamed General Shareblood when he was 14, told a reporter from the Monde that he drank a cup of human blood mixed with drugs every morning before sending out the 50 child-soldiers to fetch a prisoner or an innocent civilian whom he decapitated with a machete.

I often tell these tales of child-soldiers chosen among many because they seem particularly representative of the horrors that these children are forced to live to get out of the horror of total lack, with all the barbaric consequences which they will repeat as adults.

A friend of mine who works in Liberia told me that her mission was to teach again to orphan teenage mothers, hidden in the forest because of the war that they had to cook the rice and cereal donated by the mission to feed their weaned babies, because of their lack of knowledge they gave their babies raw cereals as they gave them raw roots in the forest, the only food available to them, and as a result their babies died of hunger.

Orphans are deprived of collective memory, they cannot access inherited survival knowledge.

Deprived of knowledge the orphans have to invent survival methods.

AIDS orphans, orphans from other causes and street children from the global village other than Africa, are representatives of suffering and the lack of access to their basic rights.

In Colombia, according to the NY Times, killer children who were orphans or street children take cocaine, kill 10 to 15 people by "contract" before being themselves murdered or by taking an overdose. Human Rights Watch published a report that estimates there are more than 11,000 children who fight in the ranks of various factions.

There as well, a senator who is looking to propose a legislation to protect them – Senator Rafael Orduz Medna – arrives at the same conclusion as the African commander:

"Children are very useful in a war, because they hardly calculate the risks involved, they adapt easily to a violent environment, eat less, earn less and are always ready to obey."

In Russia, one million children walk the streets, surviving thanks to the traffic of drugs and to prostitution therefore contributing to the spread of AIDS – increasing spread in this country as well and that spreads from the addicted population to the general population.

Migrant children barely survive in Spain and in France. In London the results of an inquiry was handed to the mayor on Tuesday November 19, 2002, on the eve of the International Children's Rights' Day, was shocking: 53% of Great Britain's capital live below the poverty line.

The International Herald Tribune prepared a report about American youth in the towns where teenage girls are raped, teenage boys are killed by gunfire and the number of unschooled children is on the rise. AS Jack Wuest, a Chicago professor stated: "These children need a helping hand and they are not getting it." This "helping hand" should be to access their basic rights, especially in the richest country in the world.

If we take into account all the lone children, risking to become unsocialized – the street children who roam in the big towns already counted as 100 million, by a census taken 10 years ago by the USAID and presented by Dr. John Pape at the 1st Health and Human Rights Conference at the FXB Center in Harvard – **BEFORE the spread of AIDS** – those who become orphans following this pandemic, more than 75 million orphans from other causes are cited in Children on the Brink 2002 – One can calculate that in 10 years, there will be at least 200 million children at risk in all the continents.

All these children have rights in the countries that opposed to the United States ratified the convention of The Rights of the Child.

But children do not vote, they cannot promote themselves. They do not buy and when they are orphans, they cannot push their parent to do it for them. Children are neither consumers nor voters...

Yet, there is a ray of hope that needs to be highlighted. In Kenya, for example, President Kibaki proclaimed free education for all. More than one million forgotten children filled the classrooms. A slow improvement is equally noticeable in Latin America – particularly in Mexico and Brazil – on the subject of children's health and education level.

200 million children at risk in all the continents by 2010, is this not a serious government crisis ? which the growing AIDS orphans population is the store window.

All of you present here today can do a lot. You keep close on a daily basis to this enormous population of young people deprived of their rights. You can encourage, inform, educate, and stimulate the governments of your countries in order for this endeavor to become a priority.

The FXB has started two Alerting initiatives:

The first consists of convincing the mayors of the whole world to declare May 7 Aids Orphans' and vulnerable Children's Day.

The aimed objective of this action is to use the alliance of the greatest number of cities in order to alert civil society, the economic world, the media and the leaders to demand from the government that they act without waiting for the worst to happen by applying the following emergency measures:

- To respect the promise made by the governments at the « Declaration of commitment about HIV/AIDS » during the General Assembly of the United Nations extraordinary Session in June 2001, that is when the Children's Rights Convention was implemented!

- To put into place rapidly and – with money supplied by the “Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria” – modest programs that are adapted to the needs, that will enable foster families and communities to raise these orphans, reinsert them into society and to give them through education and training the means to become blossoming adults, productive citizens, become part of the workforce and future consumers.

It is imperative to urgently distribute as promised antiretroviral medication to HIV positive women – as from as early as 17 so that the work done over several year to raise these children has not been done in vain.

The second initiative aims to mobilize the civil society. On May 8, 2002, I presented United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan with a symbolic safety net containing signatures of 2 million people around the world urging governments to act now to effectively address the needs of growing numbers of AIDS orphans and vulnerable children. Each name is a stitch that weaves this gigantic symbolic safety net.

We also need to encourage the world movement of North youth to the south youth – as was shown by these 20 classes in the Bronx in New York who are militants at my side for the orphans, and who actively participated to the stitching of the symbolic safety net which they stitched for real, and who transformed and enormous wall in their school – 150 meter long by 10 meters high – in permanent message – about the orphans’ distress and the urgency to act without awaiting the worst.

To fight effectively against these scourges, AIDS and abandoned children in the world, we need to implement an urgent and determined policy.

The world urgently needs a coalition of nations so that the children are able to enjoy their basic right without delay, and to ensure a possible future for this planet.

30 countries are represented here today, we could already start together: to extend the coalition of mayors, those from our towns or our villages to declare May 7, AIDS Orphans and vulnerable children’s Day. (The day of the children abandoned by adults.)

I will conclude by citing the words of the children from the South.

Gabriela Azurduy, 13, Bolivian:

“We are not the source of the problems, we are the resources that you need to solve them”

and the challenge thrown out by a young person from Bangladesh:

“Give us your children, a beautiful today. We will give you, in exchange a beautiful future”.