

May 7th is World AIDS Orphans Day

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Wednesday, May 7th is World AIDS Orphans Day. It's a grassroots campaign that calls on donor countries to commit at least 10 percent of their AIDS funding to the needs of orphans and vulnerable children. VOA's Joe De Capua reports.

World AIDS Orphans Day began in 2002 with a demonstration on Wall Street, the heart of New York City's financial district. Activists carried signs that read: "What is the value of an orphan on the New York stock exchange?"

It's estimated there are at least 15 million children worldwide who have lost one or both parents to the disease. But there are many others called vulnerable children, who are orphaned or homeless as a result of such things as other diseases, poverty, war or natural disasters. For the past 20 years, Albina du Boisrouvray has been working to help them through her FXB Foundation.



**Albina du Boisrouvray
with orphans in
Mongolia**

"It's a problem of tomorrow. Having drifting children – AIDS orphans and the vulnerable children, who are in the same state as the AIDS orphans, who if they don't have a family to raise them, if they don't have education and health care, if their brains don't develop the right way as they should in childhood – and they don't when they have stress, malnutrition, maltreatment – you're finding yourself in front of a huge, huge percentage of the next generation of adults that will have to survive by all the things, all the means that we try to fight

downstream," she says.

Such things as violence and prostitution.

"There are many, many awful problems in this world today, but our first task is to raise the next generation in a way that they can become productive citizens and not become child soldiers or terrorists or drug dealers or prostitutes or whatever. All the things we're seeing," she says.

Du Boisrouvray estimates there's a new AIDS orphan every 15 seconds. She says that in the early days of the pandemic a different definition of AIDS orphan was used. It used to be that if a child lost just one parent, the father for example, that he or she was not considered an orphan.

"The child that does not have a father is just at the same state of destitution as the child who's lost the mother because the mother has to go out to work. The mother can't take care of the child. The mother is at risk of AIDS because she is extremely poor, pushed down the level of poverty by the death of the bread earner. Probably goes into prostitution and often gets the virus. The mother falls sick. So, those children are now counted," she says.

She says another group of children is not yet technically orphans, but whose parents are so sick they can no longer take care of them.

"AIDS orphans are the tip of the iceberg (small visible part) of this discarded generation that I'm talking about. Other vulnerable children who are in need of the same access to education, to basic rights as the AIDS orphans. The AIDS orphans are just the fastest growing group and is the one we're most aware of because we're getting more and more aware of the AIDS epidemic and its devastation in Africa, which will also happen in India, China and Russia where it already is," she says.

Du Boisrouvray estimates the FXB Foundation has helped directly or indirectly some 16 million people over the past 20 years. It operates in Africa and Asia. She says that while millions are being spent on HIV / AIDS, more is needed to ensure children again find themselves in a family-type environment.

"They need to be put quickly, quickly into a structure that can help them access the hospital, test their (HIV) status, get the medicines if needed and check and monitor on the taking of the medicine. It's not a simple medicine to distribute or give," she says.

The head of the FXB Foundation used to go by the title of countess. That changed when her 24-year-old son, Francois-Xavier Bagnoud, died in 1986 when his helicopter crashed during a rescue mission in Mali. She decided to devote her life to humanitarian causes, selling most of her assets and founding FXB in honor of her son. She prefers to simply go by the name Albina.

More information on the issue is available at www.worldaidsorphans.org.

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