

Firelight Newsflash! 13 November 2007

Stars Foundation Impact Awards 2008

Deadline: 1 February 2008

Applications now open for 2008 Impact Awards: organisations working with children in Africa are invited to apply.

After the success of the 2007 Awards and the high number of applications received, we are pleased to announce the launch of the 2008 Impact Awards recognising organisations working in children's health, education and protection.

In 2007 three organisations from South Africa, Tanzania and Zimbabwe became the first Award recipients, receiving US\$100,000 each of unrestricted funding as well as consultancy support.

Please note that only organizations with an annual income of more than US\$100,000 but less than US\$5,000,000 (or equivalent in local currency) are eligible.

For download an application, please visit www.starsfoundation.org.uk or email: info@starsfoundation.org.uk.

The closing date for applications is 1 February 2008.

16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence

The 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence is an international campaign originating from the first Women's Global Leadership Institute in 1991. Participants chose the dates, November 25, International Day Against Violence Against Women and December 10, International Human Rights Day, in order to symbolically link violence against women and human rights and to emphasize that such violence is a violation of human rights. This 16-day period also highlights other significant dates including November 29, International Women Human Rights Defenders Day, December 1, World AIDS Day, and December 6, which marks the Anniversary of the Montreal Massacre.

To learn more and to participate, see <http://www.cwgl.rutgers.edu/16days/about.html>

Launch of toolkit on working with the media by the Child Rights Information Network [publication]

CRIN wanted to help with organization's media activities by offering advice on press releases, writing for the Web and emails. Good writing and presentation can make all the difference in getting your voice heard. The toolkit is arranged under several headings:

- [Turning a press release into news](#)
- [Writing emails](#)
- [Interviewing and reporting on children](#)
- [How to write for the Web](#)
- [How to get letters published in the media](#)

We expect to develop this toolkit further, but if you have any suggestions in the meantime, email:

info@crin.org.

For more information, contact: Child Rights Information Network 1 St John's Lane, London EC1M 4AR Tel: + 44 20 7012 6866 or 67 Website: www.crin.org

Online News Service: Pambazuka News

Pambazuka News is the authoritative pan African electronic weekly newsletter and platform for social justice in Africa providing cutting edge commentary and in-depth analysis on politics and current affairs, development, human rights, refugees, gender issues and culture in Africa.

To view online, go to <http://www.pambazuka.org/>

Want to join the subscriber list? Email to subscribe@pambazuka.org and your email address will be included.

DONOR PROFILE: KIOS - Finnish NGO Foundation for Human Rights

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Grantmaking Information:

Geographic focus: East Africa, post-conflict countries and countries with weak mechanisms for protecting human rights

Issue focus: Human rights, including: democratic rights, right to education, gender equality

Grant size: up to 50,000 EUR

Application process: see website for application details; applications accepted throughout the year, followed by 3 – 6 month assessment and processing

Info sur les demandes de subventions:

Aire géographique concernée: Afrique de l'Est, pays sortant d'un conflit ou avec des mécanismes peu solides pour protéger les droits humains

Centres d'intérêt : droits humains, y compris: droits démocratiques, droit à l'éducation, égalité des sexes

Montant des subventions: jusqu'à 50.000 €

Constitution du dossier: consulter le site internet pour connaître la marche à suivre; demandes acceptées toute l'année, suit une période de 3 à 6 mois d'évaluation et de traitement des demandes

The Orphans Who Didn't Need Saving, The New York Times -- 4 November 2007

By Lydia Polgreen

DAKAR, Senegal -- IN 1890, King Leopold II of Belgium wrote to one of his colonial officials and asked him to set up orphanages in the vast African territory he ruled as his personal fief, the Congo.

The only problem with his plan was that there were no orphans. The concept scarcely existed in Congo or much of the rest of Africa. This is a continent where thousands of ethnic groups and cultures across a vast and diverse landscape nevertheless share basic traditions that dictate that a child whose parents have died is the responsibility of the broader family and community.

But Leopold's problem was quickly solved - his men kidnapped boys from their families and dispatched them to the "orphanages," where they received a bit of catechism, some military training and, if they were lucky, baptism.

Mostly, as recounted by the historian Adam Hochschild in his book "King Leopold's Ghost," the boys eventually became soldiers in Leopold's vast native

army, if they did not die in the long, harsh marches to the orphanages from their villages.

For Africans, Leopold's orphan hunt, driven by relentless greed run amok in a colony he ravaged as his personal property, is only one particularly egregious example of a series of deep, and well-remembered, historical wounds.

That record helps explain the skepticism and outrage that greeted the efforts of a French charity, whose members were arrested last week as they tried to fly 103 children from Chad to France, to go hunting for orphans in the deserts between Chad and Sudan.

From the first days of European involvement in Africa, the West has helped itself to the continent's children - as chattel to be worked like beasts of burden, as soldiers to bear arms against their own kin, or as souls needing salvation through civilization. Sometimes, as the example in Congo illustrates, they were all three.

But the scandal involving the French charity, Zoé's Ark, is tangled in an even more complicated web, a modern one of apparently good intentions gone awry and of the perceived exploitation of the suffering of vulnerable people, and a profound cultural misunderstanding. The charity is not a well-known group like the dozens of experienced agencies that do lifesaving work in Darfur and eastern Chad. And it was operating far outside the normal boundaries of what established aid and human rights groups consider proper. Still, its experience shows how deeply angry Africans can become when Western "helpers" violate the continent's own traditions and sense of sovereignty.

According to its Web site, Zoé's Ark, which was started by a former fireman in France, was motivated by a sense of urgency.

In anguished language, the organization pointed to an obvious fact - the paralysis of international diplomacy in Darfur, in western Sudan, where an ethnic and political conflict has raged for four years, killing at least 200,000 and displacing 2.5 million. The Web site went on to say that something had to be done immediately to end the suffering of the most vulnerable children.

With heart-rending descriptions of children on the brink of death from starvation, violence and disease, the group raised money from French families to fly children out and place them - temporarily, it said - in French homes.

But it turns out that none of the 103 children are orphans in the traditional Western sense - foundlings with no place to go. Almost all were living with family members in villages, relatively well fed and cared for, according to the United Nations. The bewildered children cried as foreign reporters flocked to the orphanage in Abéché, Chad, where they were being temporarily housed late last week until they could be reunited with their families.

The children said they had been coaxed away from their families with sweets and cookies, according to Reuters, and a group of women claiming to be mothers of some children told a French cable news station that they had been told the children would be taken to Abéché for schooling, but that their families would still be able to visit them.

Zoé's Ark seems to have run into the same problem that Leopold did: In many African societies finding a true orphan is not such a simple thing.

When details of the operation became known, high French officials, United Nations officials, and indignant French citizens, newspapers and child protection agencies sounded their disapproval of Zoé's Ark's actions. Jo Becker, child rights advocate at Human Rights Watch in New York, said that removing a child from his or her immediate surroundings might make sense only under circumstances like immediate risk of being forced into military service or a threat of immediate harm. "We would always say," she said, "that the best place for children is in their community and with their families."

To be sure, orphanages are full of children in cities across Africa, especially in countries where the AIDS pandemic has shattered entire extended families. And migration to cities has frayed some family bonds.

But many African countries, despite having a surfeit of children with dead or missing parents, have laws surrounding adoption that reflect a strong unease with the concept as it is practiced in the West. As a result, relatively few African children are adopted each year, especially compared with adoptions from Asia and eastern Europe.

Even the idea of Western adoptions sometimes seems to rankle. When Madonna adopted a young boy from Malawi last year, a fierce outcry erupted over whether she had followed proper procedures and whether the boy's father had been duped.

In largely Muslim countries like Chad and Sudan, where Islamic law governs family matters, the entire Western concept of adoption is essentially forbidden by religious edict.

The current episode has a particular sting because Europe has been writing increasingly stringent rules to keep Africans from migrating there, culminating most recently in a new French law that in some cases requires DNA testing to get visas for family members. Taking a planeload of children away in secret while thousands of Africans drown in the Atlantic seeking to migrate to Spain strikes many Africans as hypocritical.

"What message is the transaction sending?" demanded an editorial in the African Executive, an online business magazine. "Will Zoé's Ark transport the 201 million

Africans facing extreme hunger to Europe? Africa must vehemently resist this humiliation. If Zoé's Ark is serious on the African plight, let it press Europe to open its borders to African migrants, grant African professionals jobs without discrimination, drop its barriers against African goods and allow Africa to export finished products."

But accusations of hypocrisy can cut both ways. Chad's president for the last 17 years, Idriss Déby, abandoned his usual reticence with the international news media to deliver sound bites to the reporters who swarmed to Abéché.

He called the situation an outrage, and speculated that perhaps Zoé's Ark planned to sell the children to pedophiles. Burnished cane in hand, he walked awkwardly among the scrawny boys and girls. It is hard to say when this former military dictator last paid so much attention to Chad's children.

Despite the country's burgeoning oil industry and increased foreign investment, especially from China, Chad's 1.9 million children under the age of 5, like most of those taken by Zoé's Ark, are among the most defenseless in the world against disease, hunger and death. One-fifth won't make it to their fifth birthdays, according to UNICEF statistics, mostly because of treatable diseases like malaria, measles and diarrhea. More than 40 percent will be stunted from hunger. Like millions of other impoverished children across Africa, they are waiting patiently for some kind of rescue.