Forum: ECOSOC

Issue: Devising Measures to Prevent Social Orphanhood

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Introduction

It is estimated that 140 million children worldwide are orphans (according to the UNICEF). However, only 13 million have lost both parents. Evidence clearly shows that the vast majority of orphans have a surviving parent, grandparent, or other family member. Social orphanhood is one of the most distressing phenomena of modern life. It's alarming that, despite the declared or taken measures, the number of orphaned children remains stable from year to year, or decreases only slightly. Social orphanhood is characterized in socially disadvantaged families. The main cause of child abandonment is the inability or unwillingness of parents to educate their children and provide them with everything that is necessary. Sometimes this is due to the lack of material resources - the income of many families does not even reach the living wage, especially in small towns, where the problems of unemployment and low salaries are most urgent. In some cases it may be caused by a serious illness of the adult family member, disability, when a person loses the ability to work and take care of the child. However, most social orphans are children whose parents are antisocial - alcohol abusers, or drug addicts. Prevention is a promising and important activity in efforts to address social orphanhood, as it is easier to prevent than to fight it. Social departments are trying to find most comfortable and harmless ways of solving the problem of youth's orphanhood. It is necessary for the state to take special measures that will be focused on the increase of quality of life of such children and meeting all their social needs and raising their status in society.

Definition of key terms

<u>Orphan</u>

UNICEF and global partners define an orphan as a child who has lost one or both parents.
A 'single orphan' defines the loss of one parent and a 'double orphan' – the loss of both parents.

<u>Social orphan</u>

Also known as 'abandoned child', meaning:
a child aged below 18, who became an orphan with one or both parents/relatives alive.

<u>Orphanage</u>

Orphanage is a public institution for the care of orphans.

Background information

Analysis of existing forms and methods of social orphanhood prevention involves identifying its causes, studying the influence of personal factors on social orphanhood, namely the problem of mother abandoning the child. Economic pressure (most of the families in risk zone have an income below the subsistence level and are not able to satisfy children's vital needs) - unemployment, lack of housing; social exclusion (inability to get skilled care due to loss of

necessary documents, estrangement from family and neighbors and gathering in a group with its own interests) and psychological factors (crisis of family relations, parents' incompetence, violence or alienation towards children) are all revealed to be key causes of social orphanhood.

Major countries and organizations involved:

- Alarmal Charitable Association for Orphans care
- Centre for Orphaned and Disabled Children
- ORA International (Orphans, Refugees and Aid)
- United Orphanage School
- World Association for Orphans
- UNICEF

All the Member States are more or less involved in this process, but Asian, Middle Eastern, Latin American and African countries have the world's highest rates of orphaned and abandoned children (Afghanistan, Arakan, Sudan, Somalia, Syria, Iraq Haiti, Patani, Lebanon, Palestine). Other countries where the orphanghood is considered to be a serious problem are India, Kazakhstan, Latvia, USA, Ukraine, Denmark, Sweden, France, Germany, Italy, and Russian Federation.

Relevant treaties and UN resolutions:

- Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1924:

  1. The child must be given the means requisite for its normal development, both materially and spiritually.
  2. The child that is hungry must be fed, the child that is sick must be nursed, the child that is backward must be helped, the delinquent child must be reclaimed, and the orphan and the waif must be sheltered and succoured.
  3. The child must be the first to receive relief in times of distress.
  4. The child must be put in a position to earn a livelihood, and must be protected against every form of exploitation.
  5. The child must be brought up in the consciousness that its talents must be devoted to the service of its fellow men.

- The Hague Convention in 1993:

  The preamble to the Convention states:
  'Intercountry adoptions shall be made in the best interests of the child and with respect for his or her fundamental rights and to prevent the abduction, the sale of, or traffic in children and each State should take, as a matter of priority, appropriate measures to enable the child to remain in the care of his or her family of origin'
  The main objectives of the Convention, set out in Article 1, are:
  1 to establish safeguards to ensure that intercountry adoptions take place in the best interests of the child and with respect for his or her fundamental rights as recognized in international law,
  2 to establish a system of co-operation amongst Contracting States to ensure that those

safeguards are respected and thereby prevent the abduction, the sale of, or traffic in children,

3   to secure the recognition in Contracting States of adoptions made in accordance with the Convention.

- Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1994:

The Convention deals with the child-specific needs and rights. It states that the "nations that ratify this convention are bound to it by international law". Ratifying states must act in the best interests of the child. All jurisdictions implementing the Convention require compliance with child custody and guardianship laws as that every child has basic rights, including the right to life, his or her own name and identity, to be raised by his or her parents within a family or cultural grouping, and to have a relationship with both parents, even if they are separated.

The Convention obliges states to allow parents to exercise their parental responsibilities. The Convention also acknowledges that children have the right to express their opinions and to have those opinions heard and acted upon when appropriate, to be protected from abuse or exploitation, and to have their privacy protected, and it requires that their lives are not the subject to excessive interference.

Previous attempts to solve the issue

One of the most important measures was the creation of charitable Foundations to eliminate the consequences of orphanhood by investing to orphanage, education, nutrition, psychological care, and support. Attempts to allievate this problem have often centred on efforts to strengthen the 'institution of the family', an endeavour marked with a great deal of conservative ideas on how families are being torn apart by a crisis of morality. Yet, despite efforts to strengthen the moral values of families, the authorities have not proved to be successful in stopping the increase of orphans.

Possible solutions

The global analysis suggests that we should further expand our scope, focusing less on the concept of orphanhood and more on a range of factors that render children vulnerable. These factors include the family's ownership of property, the poverty level of the household, the child's relationship to the head of the household, and the education level of the child's parents. The problem of identifying risk families and ways to rehabilitate them should be under attention together with projects of working with future parents for prevention. To solve the issue it's best for the Member States to actively support such programs in order to strengthen family values, promote conscious conceiving of children and help young parents to feel responsible for their born babies, increase the possibility of the participation of children in the processes of development their own projects or lectures at children's homes and schools (Activist school or Out-of-school organizations), create favorable conditions for the full and equal participation of orphans and simple kids in society in social life at all levels, develop the system of timely identification of families in difficult situations in the early stages of development of social disadvantage, families with children with disabilities.