



**SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES
INTERNATIONAL**

Statement of SOS Children's Villages concerning international adoption in the aftermath of the Haiti earthquake

During a catastrophic emergency like the earthquake in Haiti pictures of injured and vulnerable children, hungry or traumatised, stir high emotions. Many people react instinctively and want to give these children what they have apparently lost: safety, love and a caring family. In such circumstances urgent requests for, and offers of, adoption are manifold and understandable.

However, the reality on the ground is different. It will take weeks or even months to register children who are on their own and reunite them with their families. It will take months to identify those children who have lost both their parents and extended family and are left with no one to care for them.

In the meantime, children affected by the earthquake need immediate care, shelter, food, drinking water, clothes and stability. Skilled care workers with experience in working with traumatised children and minimizing the stress are required to restore a sense of security and belonging.

SOS Children's Villages, together with other organisations, has started an emergency programme for unaccompanied children. This includes the provision of safe drinking water, food, clothes, emergency health care, sanitation and the establishing of safe spaces for children.

In the coming weeks and months the SOS Children's Villages Emergency Programme will provide temporary care for children separated from their families. The primary aim is to trace families and the reintegration of children with their parents, extended family, or family friends who are willing and able to care for the child. The validity of relationships and the confirmation of the willingness of the child and family member to be reunited must be verified for every child.

For children with no family at all or with an extended family that is not able to care for the children, the best possible solution for the individual child will be found. Special attention will be given to keeping siblings together. Decisions regarding adoption or any other form of permanent care solution should definitely not be made as an immediate response to the emergency.

SOS Children's Villages acknowledges adoption as an appropriate care solution for children who have lost their parents and have no extended family who are willing and able to care for them. However, it is the conviction of SOS Children's Villages that children should grow up learning their native language within their own culture and faith. Only in circumstances where adequate local possibilities have been exhausted, proper legal channels have been followed, and the fundamental principles of international adoption, as established by the Hague Adoption Convention have been met, should international adoption be considered.

In the specific case of the earthquake in Haiti international adoption should be avoided until every effort has been undertaken to reunite each child with her/his family or to provide suitable care within the country complying with international legal standards such as the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children. (<http://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/Publications/Guidelines-Policies-Papers/Pages/Guidelines-for-the-Alternative-Care-of-Children.aspx>)

Statement by SOS Children's Villages International