

CNN International

Live Telephone Interview with Safia Awan

Date: Wednesday, 18 January 2006

Programme: "Your World Today" - During the programme, the dire conditions of the children who had survived the Pakistan earthquake was featured.

CNN Reporters: Zain Verjee and Jim Clancy

Guest: Mrs. Safia Awan, Vice-President SOS Children's Villages in Pakistan



Princess Salimah Agah Khan and Safia Awan, Vice-President SOS Children's Villages in Pakistan, with children inside a tent in Muzaffarabad - Pakistan earthquake Credit SOS CV Pakistan

The Programme / Interview:

Jim Clancy: The good news we can bring you today is that the paralyzing weather has let up enough to allow relief flights back into the earthquake ravaged areas of Pakistan.

Zain Verjee: After being grounded for three days, helicopters are once again ferrying life saving supplies to the hungry and freezing. But many key roads remain impassable, blocked by the landslides that were triggered by heavy rain and snow. Three million are estimated homeless since the October earthquake.

Jim Clancy: Some statistics... the UN reports that at least half of the survivors are children. Many of these children remain high in the mountains and remain far from relief...

(A documentary about the survival efforts of children in Kashmir who were orphaned by the earthquake is aired.)

Zain Verjee: For more on the special needs of the youngest survivors of the quake, we turn now to Safia Awan, she is the Vice-President of SOS Children's Villages ... she is also the leader of the SOS relief work in Pakistan. Thanks for being with us. How is your organisation helping Pakistani children like these we just saw (in the report)?

Safia Awan: Our organisation, SOS Children's Villages, concentrates on the orphaned children. Presently we have "search and rescue" teams that are going into the affected areas and are identifying these children, and then bringing them to our existing facilities. There are a lot of orphans, we cannot estimate how many. Just to give you an example: in the last two weeks we identified 40 orphans. We have a limited number of "search and rescue" teams that are out there. We give children a life - we take care of them for life, for their education, for their living, for everything. But there are a lot of children who are out there who still have their parents and their life is miserable and very bleak, and especially with the current conditions. And, as I also heard in your report, they survived the earthquake but will they survive the aftermath, which is very bleak at the moment. We have a lot of children who have pneumonia; they are dying of hyperthermia; frostbite. In the relief camps - and even in the low-laying areas - the sanitation conditions are not good so there are a lot of skin diseases; scabies; there was a measles epidemic; diseases like gastroenteritis; diarrhoea.

Zain Verjee: How hard is it for you to integrate the orphans you talk about - that you work with - into society and deal with some of the emotional, traumatic situations that they are in?

Safia Awan: I was amazed, and most of our workers are amazed, at how resilient these children are. They want to concentrate on their education - the older ones who are already going to school. The younger ones who are babies have lost their mothers, so for them to accept any other lady as their mother is difficult at the beginning but then they take to her.

But it is really quite amazing how resilient these children are. I think they are doing better than the grown-ups are. And how the siblings help each other! And not only the siblings but also the other children who have been orphaned - how the orphans help each other! If you go to our facilities and you look at these children, you may be shocked as you often can't even say that they lost their parents only a couple of months ago.

Zain Verjee: Many of these children are vulnerable to child traffickers, to sexual predators, how much of a concern is that to you?

Safia Awan: It is a concern as it would be anywhere in the world. When there is a disaster, the scum of the earth comes out and they do try to take advantage of it. But the Pakistani government and the Pakistani army are very aware of this and they have taken a number of steps to stop this.

Zain Verjee: If people who are watching this want to help the children in Pakistan, what is it that you would like them to do?

Safia Awan: First of all pray that these children get a good life, and that we do find these children and that we can take care of them. What we need right now, instead of tents, we need shelters for these children; we need basic health units to give them the basic health amenities; they need basic education. They need everything and anything that we would give to our own children - these children need it!

Zain Verjee: Safia Awan, the Vice-President of SOS Children's Villages on the line. Thank you so much.