

Dear Friends,

Greetings and best wishes for a joyous Eid and happy New Year from all of us associated with SOS Children's Villages of Pakistan.

For us this first year of the new millenium has a very special significance. It has seen us celebrate 25 years of the establishment of SOS in Pakistan and, also, move into high gear our plans for the future. As we look back at what we have been able to achieve we are justifiably proud. From the first village established in Lahore, we now have 22 projects all over the country and many more planned. This has been possible only because of your commitment and steady support for the welfare of the orphans in our midst and words are insufficient to express our thanks.

At the time of our anniversary celebration I announced our plans to commemorate the event by establishing six new SOS Children's Villages in the following cities: Multan, Sialkot, Hyderabad, Peshawar, Muzaffarabad and Mirpur. Keep in mind that six SOS Children's Villages actually imply another 18 projects, as every Children's Village must have its accompanying Youth Home and Community School. This is an ambitious undertaking but, with your help we will, InshAllah, meet this target. You will surely be pleased to hear that the first of these projects, the SOS Children's Villages in Multan and Muzaffarabad and the Primary School in Muzaffarabad are well underway and will be ready for occupancy during the coming year. The planning of the other projects is in hand and they are being delayed only for acquisition of suitable sites. This is usually a lengthy exercise as it involves applying for government grants. However, I don't mean to complain as in every case land has been donated by the respective provincial governments and we are greatly indebted to them. Without this assistance we cannot consider establishing projects as the additional cost of the land would make it prohibitive. In addition, I must gratefully acknowledge the encouragement and assistance of the National Zakat Foundation which, in providing generous support for the construction of new projects, is largely responsible for our being able to plan so ambitiously.

Through the winter months we had been busy preparing for our 25th. Anniversary celebrations scheduled for the first week of March, 2000. They began with the SOS Walks in Lahore and Karachi which were highly successful. We hope our other centres will join this annual event which raises funds for subsidising the community schools we have established. Since we have a

low fee structure and restrict admission to under-privileged children, it is necessary to raise additional funds for this purpose.

On March 7th. Mr. Helmut Kutin, President SOS Kinderdorf International and Mr. Richard Pichler, Secretary General, arrived in Karachi to participate in our celebrations. Barrister Shahida Jamil, Minister for Law, Social Welfare and Women Development opened the SOS Hermann Gmeiner School. The guests had lunch in the Village and in the evening Friends of SOS hosted an elegant dinner for them. This was followed the next day by another elaborate dinner hosted by Friends of SOS in Islamabad which was attended by many senior diplomats and well-wishers of SOS.

The next event was dramatic and most impressive. Accompanied by the Prime Minister of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Barrister Sultan Mehmood Chaudhry, a large contingent of ambassadors, other diplomats and guests were ferried from Islamabad to Muzaffarabad in helicopters, for the laying of the foundation stone of the SOS Children's Village. The welcome was overwhelming and rivalled any State visit. Everyone was impressed by the organisation and enchanted by the dazzling views of the snow-capped mountains en route. Credit goes to Safia Awan, Chairperson of Friends of SOS in Islamabad for a superb show.

The following day the opening ceremonies of the new Vocational Training Centre and SOS Youth Home in Rawalpindi were performed by Dr. Attiya Inayatullah, then member of the National Security Council and Mr. Helmut Kutin respectively. This was followed by an impressive function in the beautiful SOS Children's Village.

On March 12th the main Anniversary celebration was held in the SOS Children's Village, Lahore with the Chief Executive of Pakistan, General Pervez Musharraf as the Chief Guest. After a tour of the Village he inaugurated the newly constructed Primary School which represents the third and final phase of the SOS Hermann Gmeiner School. This was followed by the formal function and after the speeches and introduction of some of our alumni, the children presented a charming programme. The Chief Executive graciously announced a grant of Rs.6 million representing the cost of a family home in each of the six new Villages planned, and also a grant of land for the construction of a new Youth Home in Lahore. He and Mrs. Musharraf, who accompanied him, expressed their appreciation of the standard of facilities provided for the children.

Brief news from the projects:

Lahore

As is to be expected the **SOS Children's Village** was the centre of much activity especially in view of the anniversary celebrations. Since the National Office is also located here it was an exceptionally busy time and we welcomed a large number of visitors and donors. Early in the year three of our girls were married in quick succession. Such occasions generate a great deal of excitement because the children must all have appropriate clothes and participate wholeheartedly in the various functions. The marriage expenses of all our girls are met through donations by various members of Friends of SOS and we greatly appreciate this support. Our children are fortunate to be invited to participate in various activities by the community. Apart from an exciting trip to Shogran in the summer another highlight has been an invitation extended by Singapore Airlines in October. Thirty children had a wonderful time at a function celebrating the opening of their office in Lahore.

The **SOS Youth Home** is a busy hub of activity with the boys attending either school, college or skill training programmes. This is a crucial time for them when they are preparing to learn to stand on their own feet and four more have left during the course of the year.

The **SOS Hermann Gmeiner School** complex which has been functioning for 12 years was finally completed with the opening of the Primary School by General Musharraf in March.

As with all our previous projects this, too, has been constructed through donations of individual classrooms by our well-wishers. It is a well-designed and cheerful facility occupied by 480 children who are so proud of their new premises. This addition brings the total capacity of the school to 1500.

Dhodial

The **SOS Children's Village** in Dhodial was the second project to be established in Pakistan and has been making steady progress. There are now 145 children admitted, including 31 new admissions during the year. They attend the adjacent **SOS Hermann Gmeiner School** which now has the status of a Higher Secondary School. Some of the children are doing exceptionally well and are applying for scholarships.

The Dhodial children are fortunate to be able to participate in the activities of the Adventure Foundation of Pakistan. Groups have been skiing, trekking and camping and 16 boys from the

Youth Home and SOS Village participated in Rock Climbing and Watermanship Courses. Groups of children have also visited Chatter Plain, Nathia Gali and Khewra.

The **Rural Vocational Centre for Girls** is providing regular training for the older girls and the **Health Centre** is also fully functional.

Abbottabad

The **SOS Youth Home** now has 32 boys who are attending the local schools and colleges. The adjacent **SOS Rural Vocational Centre** is presently offering training in two trades, electrical and plumbing. Welding will also be introduced shortly. The boys are regularly attending the training sessions after school and these additional skills will stand them in good stead in the future.

Karachi

The Village now wears a bright and cheerful look as, over the past couple of years, a great deal of effort has been put into upgrading the facilities. The Village Committee and Friends of SOS have been busy arranging donations of fabric and other essentials for making the homes and surrounding area more attractive.

The year started with the celebration of the Silver Jubilee of SOS Children's Villages of Pakistan, the first event being the SOS Walk in February. It was led by a Managing Committee member Mr. Javed Jabbar, then Minister for Information & Media Development who specially flew in for the event.

After a gap of two years, the 'Family' again held a five day summer camp with sessions of drawing, painting, games, carpentry, flower making, all kinds of handwork, clay modeling etc. In between were visits of various age groups to a bowling alley, the fire station, factories, the zoo. It was a wonderful experience for the children, and ended with a special supper and drama performance for which the children had been busy rehearsing. This year a scouting programme was started in which all the boys are participating, the younger ones as Shaheen Scouts. They are all very excited and enthusiastic about it. The P.I.A. Scouts branch has given invaluable support under Mr. Ghazanfar Mashkoo, who is the Provincial Commissioner of PIA Boy Scouts Association.

In November the Children's Carnival was organised for a second time and was even more successful than the previous one. It was co-sponsored by ABN Amro & Citibank and apart from raising funds raised awareness about the activities of SOS.

The **SOS Youth Home** is still occupying rented accommodation which is now very crowded and efforts are under way to obtain land and construct our own building. One of the boys, Kashif Khaleque, joined the Cadet College, Petaro in August. He is a bright boy who has consistently been standing first in his class and we are confident he will do well in this institution.

The **SOS Hermann Gmeiner School** is now well established and more and more children from the community are seeking admission.

Rawalpindi

The **SOS Children's Village, Rawalpindi** presently accommodates 155 children in 18 family homes. Two more are being added as there is a steady increase in requests for admission. In February, the Government of AJK handed over 30 orphans of Kashmiri origin to the Government of Pakistan, at a ceremony at Kohala Bridge. These children were then given to the SOS Children's Village and are being cared for by the 'mothers' who accompanied them. The Prime Minister of AJK, Barrister Sultan Mehmood Chaudhry also hosted a lunch for all the children at the Village. During the year a number of foreign dignatories visited the Village including representatives from the Embassies of Saudi Arabia, USA, Canada, Egypt, Burma, Kuwait, and the UN Womens Group. In October the President Exploration OMV, Dr. Gerhard Roiss, visited with a delegation and donated a large quantity of medicines and medical apparatus for distribution to all the Villages. He also announced the sponsorship of 10 SOS children in Rawalpindi and the donation of 2 family homes in new projects.

The marriages of two girls were arranged during the year and the festivities were thoroughly enjoyed by all the children.

The **SOS Youth Home** was officially opened in March and is occupied by 44 boys. It is a well designed facility situated in the same compound as the **SOS Technical Training School**. This is an impressive institution presently offering training in the trades of Radio & TV, Refrigeration, Air Conditioning, Armature Rewinding and Electrical. There has been a very positive response from the community and it is now being considered that a second shift also be started to meet the demand. The Rawalpindi Committee has done a fine job in establishing these two new facilities.

Faisalabad

Many programmes were organised in the **SOS Children's Village** during the year, such as the celebration of Pakistan Day, National holidays and both Eids. The children participate

enthusiastically and enjoy the interaction with the frequent visitors. The 143 children in this project attend the adjacent **SOS Hermann Gmeiner High School** which has been expanded during the past year. Five girls are now in college and doing well. The **SOS Youth Home** accommodates 29 boys who are also attending school or college.

Sargodha

Our newest **SOS Children's Village** in this city now has 55 children residing in six family homes. This will now begin to fill up quite rapidly as all the other Villages are fully occupied. Finding suitable mothers poses a problem everywhere but particularly in this city, as society is more conservative.

The management is doing an excellent job in arranging for donations of all types and, through these initiatives, have been able to keep their running costs below that of any other project. Many people are willing to donate in kind and it is for us to tap this source.

Special functions were organised for all the National days and the two Eids were celebrated with the usual enthusiasm. The children also enjoyed the outings arranged from time to time, the most exciting being a visit to Lahore and 'Baba ki Basti', a nearby village. The latter trip was sponsored by the owners of the 'Basti' and was a memorable excursion.

The **SOS Hermann Gmeiner** is gradually gaining popularity and increasing numbers of children are seeking admission. Efforts are being made to ensure a good standard of education and all modern facilities, including computers, are being provided.

A large number of visitors have visited the project over the past year. Notable amongst them was Col. S. K. Tressler, Federal Minister.

Multan

For the past 18 months an **SOS Children's Home** has been functioning in a large house made available in the compound of Colony Textile Mills. This has been transformed into a bright and cheerful facility which accommodates 56 children. The children are divided into 'families' under the care of six 'mothers' and have been allocated a large room for each group, in anticipation of moving into their homes in the new Village. There has been an excellent response to the establishment of SOS in Multan and every child admitted is fully sponsored. Congratulations to the Committee as this is something other Villages have not yet achieved.

With the exception of one toddler, all the children attend the local school. Tutors have been arranged for after school studies and last year's pass result was 99%.

There are facilities for both indoor and outdoor games. The children play cricket, tennis and hockey and often arrange competitions with other teams. Besides this they are taken on regular outings and are generally very well cared for. On a recent visit I was most impressed by the obvious fact that this group of children is truly 'cherished' and that is what SOS is all about.

Kasur

The second year of partnership of the **SOS Rural Support Programme** with ActionAid is under way and the work has been extended to include four more villages, in addition to the previous seven. Credit schemes have been initiated and agricultural implements acquired to help small farmers get more yield. The Adult Literacy Programme is being successfully carried out and the Family Planning Programme, through trained TBA's (dais), is gaining momentum. A mobile dispensary is attending to patients in seven villages which have no other medical facility. Seven Primary Schools are imparting education to almost 600 children. An encouraging feature of this programme is the involvement of the Youth Committees. They are fully involved and actively participate in group activities.

Future plans

I am sure you will agree that it has, all in all, been an eventful and successful year for us and takes us another step forward towards realising our goal of being able to reach deserving children in every part of the country. We still have a long way to go before we can consider stopping further expansion. As mentioned earlier, projects in Multan and Muzaffarabad are under construction and Sialkot, Peshawar, Hyderabad and Mirpur are in the pipeline. Beyond that we also have plans to establish Villages in D.I. Khan, Quetta and Rawalakot. Very ambitious, but also very necessary. Whilst thanking you for your help in the past I urge you to consider donating towards the cost of the new projects. A family home now costs Rs.1 million and will be 'sadqa jaria' for perpetuity. Besides that any donations, large or small, will help us get closer to realising our goal. In addition we also need more regular sponsorships for the children in our care. A full sponsorship is now Rs.2,000 per month and partial sponsorships are also welcome. Please consider this and direct them to the Village of your choice. And please do remember to tell those who may not be aware that **we are financing all our projects ourselves**. This is something many people do not know. Infact, we are the only country, out of the 131 affiliated

with the umbrella organisation, SOS Kinderdorf International, which is not dependent on their support. This is no small feather in our cap and credit goes to all of you.

The work we are doing has great rewards and I would like to share with you one of the high points. A young boy and his brother, who had been street children, were admitted by us many years ago. The older of the two was brilliant, gained admission to the National College of Arts, Lahore and eventually found his way to Hong Kong. He now has a successful computer business and says all he has been able to achieve is due to SOS. He is sponsoring two children and recently sent us Rs.1 million for the construction of a family home, plus Rs.200,000 for the marriage expenses of two girls. On a personal note he told me that he has named his Taiwanese wife Souriya, as he says 'you are the mother of all the SOS Children and I would like the mother of my children to also have your name'. It doesn't get much better than that!

You are the ones who make wonderful stories like this possible. On behalf of all the children who are getting a chance in life, please accept heartfelt thanks.

Before ending I must also express my appreciation to all the volunteers who come to spend time with the children, assisting in their development and also bringing joy into their lives - particularly those groups of students who come on a regular basis. And last but not least, sincere gratitude to Friends of SOS everywhere, whether they are in Pakistan or abroad. Your steady support gives us great strength and reassurance.

God bless you all for caring.

Yours sincerely,

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