



www.opcr.org

Produced and compiled by the Organization for the Protection of Children's Rights, Mumbai
901B, Emgee Greens, Indiateel complex, M.T.V. Road, Wadala (E), Mumbai 400 037, India

Tel: +91 22 32562807

Email: roshniudyavar@hotmail.com

Head Office

5167 Jean-Talon, Suite 370

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

H1S 1K8

Tel: (514) 593-4303

Fax: (514) 593-4659

Email: ficcaa@osde.ca

Editorial Team:

Riccardo Di Done

Angela Ficca

Roshni Udyavar

ISSN 1729-8997

(Online Edition)

Inside . . .

- 2 Children of Tibet
- 3 Documentary Review & The Nithari Killings
- 4 Christmas Spirit Fills the Air!
- 5 Project Kiran Updates
- 6 Study on Violence Against Children

Children Speak

Vol 5, No.21, December '06 - January '07

A Newsletter of the Organization for the Protection of Children's Rights

Message from the President

Providing a healthy and protective environment that allows our child to develop physically, psychologically and emotionally should be our first priority. In many developed countries, families have the freedom of offering much more than the basic needs to a child, but unfortunately there are more underprivileged parents who do not have such luxury and their only wish for their child is to offer them a healthy life.

In times of war, the most important need is simply to survive. In the attempt to save themselves from torture, dismemberment or death, families will risk everything to escape their war torn country. All too often, they do not succeed and countless innocent civilians die needlessly. As for the survivors, they become refugees depending on emergency aid systems in a country where they have no rights.

The horrendous psychological consequences war has on children should not be overlooked. A great number of child refugees will experience post traumatic stress disorders, anxieties and will suffer from depression. Moreover, they will be in a foreign country where they will have to learn a new

culture and way of living, but most of them will often search for their roots, never forgetting their country of origin, as you will read in the article about the Children of Tibet.



Riccardo Di Done

Some of these vulnerable refugee youngsters, who often became orphans during their long journey to a safe country, will unfortunately be the target of crimes. Left alone with no one to defend them, wandering the streets in unsafe neighborhoods, they face the danger of being kidnapped, tortured or forced to join political gangs. Dropping out of school and expected to act like adults at an early age, they live in very threatening and uncertain regions. The children of Kashmir live in this kind of fear everyday as explained in the article entitled Invisible Kashmir.

Children need to feel protected and secure, but how can they feel that way when they do not even know where they will find their next

Continued on Page 6



Children of Tibet

Shibayan Raha, Campaigns Coordinator, Friends of Tibet

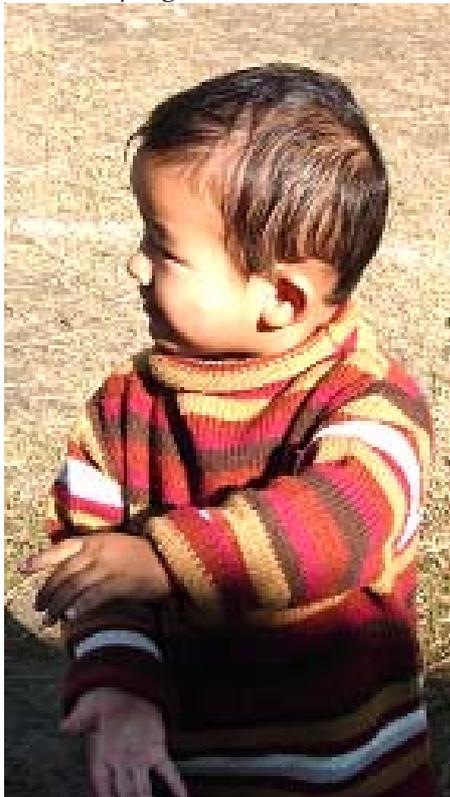
Over 80,000 Tibetans have fled into exile since China invaded Tibet in 1949. More than 130,000 Tibetans are living in exile around the world. The majority of them live in India and are spread across different Tibetan settlements. Today the community consists of fourth generation Tibetans born and brought up in exile. These youngsters have never been to Tibet or even seen Tibet. Yet the eagerness for a place called home is alive in them.

Tibetans born and brought up in exile face an identity crisis. They have to carry a Registration certificate (R.C) - their permit to stay in India - which they have to renew every year. The R.C. states that their nationality is Tibetan and that they are foreigners residing in India.

However, Tibet as a nation does not exist on the world map. When someone asks a Tibetan about his/her nationality, the individual often feels defiant and is confronted with questions, doubts and sympathy.

I recently went to a T.S.G (Tibet Support Group) conference in Bodhgaya, Bihar, where I met a group of young Tibetan students from Saranath, Varanasi. While we were waiting for the train at the station, a middle aged gentleman walked up to our group and demanded to know their nationality. Their answer was met with more questions and doubts. Finally, the gentleman came up with the following conclusion, "All Tibetans in India should take Indian Citizenship because Tibet will never become free". While listening to the conversation, I felt that we as citizens of a free nation will never understand that the only dream of Tibetans born in exile is to return home, return to a place they can feel as their own - a country called Tibet.

Many of these refugee children also come to India from Tibet with their families while they are quite young in search of freedom and



**"I am Tibetan... But I am not from Tibet, Never been there... Yet I dream Of dying there."
- Tenzin Tsundue**

education in their own language and culture. They have to take a perilous journey of 20-25 days, sometimes longer through high altitude passes, knee deep snow, sub zero temperatures and without proper food and clothing. They travel during the night and hide during the day in order to avoid being caught by Chinese border guards. Most of these children suffer from frostbite, high altitude sickness, etc.

On March 1997, Deyang a 13 year old girl died on her way to exile as a result of extreme cold which developed into lung infection. She was cremated somewhere in the high pass. A Tibetan refugee, a mother of three children who crossed into exile leaving her daughter behind in the passes narrates her story, "One day my daughter said, "Amala I can go no longer," with her leg gone red due to severe frostbite. "Don't worry about me. Take care of my brothers. I will join you in exile. Every evening I light a candle for my daughter and her brothers join me in prayers.

The danger of being caught is always there. Recently on 30th September 2006, a group of 70 fleeing Tibetan refugees on the Nepal-Tibet border were shot by Chinese border guards. Two of them died, 33 were detained by the Chinese border guards, while 35 reached India - 15 of them children, the youngest was only 6 years old. Their whereabouts are still unknown. This event was shot live by international mountaineers who were at the nearby base camp at Mt. Everest.

In India most of these refugee children study in schools called Tibetan Children's Village (T.C.V.) and Central School for Tibetans administered by the Tibetan Government in Exile (T.G.I.E.). After completing their education they are faced with another dilemma, the dilemma of unemployment. There's a popular saying

Continued on Page 6

Invisible Kashmir

Documentary by Dilnaz Boga

The film begins with the famous lines of poet Omar Khayyam: "If there is paradise on earth...It is here...it is here..." - this no more stands true in the case of Kashmir. *Invisible Kashmir – the other side of Jannat* is an attempt by two Indian journalists to discover the plight of helpless children in the valley. Their lives are literally nipped in the bud as they stay day in and day out under the constant threat of being attacked at any moment. These young boys and girls enter school under the shadow of guns and frisking for weapons is commonplace for them. What they fail to understand is the graveness of the situation.

The documentary covers Srinagar and surrounding districts namely Kanihal, Bandipore, Dora and Nadihaal thus exploring the prospects of children going to school in these areas after the army takes over the schools. The results are expected but shocking. A large majority of children have left schools after the army transformed the sacred learning places into war posts and refuge arenas.

The very threatening environment has an over powering impact on the psychological state of Kashmiri children.

The documentary incorporates interviews of children varying from the age of 8 years to 17 years who have fallen prey to the militant and the national army tussle over occupying Kashmir. The very opinions and bold answers given by these children, very well put across the fact that these children have grown way beyond their age and have lost their innocence somewhere in the deafening noise and chaos of the turbulent war.

The uncertainty of the situation takes a toll on the mental state of these children. One never knows as to when a bomb will explode and claim hundreds of innocent lives in the process. Gunculture has become a part of the Kashmiri lifestyle. Today a child would know exactly the difference between an AK47 and a SLR. Cases of enforced disappearances, abduction of non-guilty citizens by the army are increasing by the day here.

About 38% of the Kashmiri Population comprises of children and almost all face a bleak present and a future that is tense. Unless of course, correct education and proper schooling weans away the children from their present situation of crisis. ■

To obtain a DVD of the documentary "Invisible Kashmir", contact Ms. Dilnaz Boga dilnazb@gmail.com



Review

Why wait for Nitharis to remind us that children are vulnerable to abuse?



The Family of one of the missing children flash the photo of their child; INSET: 40 polyurethane bags containing body parts and organs of children were recovered by Police in the drain of the accused

A wave of revulsion swept through the country after details of the mass killings in Nithari village of Noida - a suburb of the Indian capital, Delhi - unfolded like one grotesque sequel after another of a horror film. Murders involving much larger numbers is not so rare in India, but these killings evoked a different response altogether from the masses.

News

Is it because at least 17 young women and children were killed over a period of one and a half years in this village, no more than 18 miles (30kms) from the capital Delhi and right next to one of modern India's most prosperous and upcoming districts, Noida? Or because the police took so long to crack the case?

Where else in the world could children be disappearing like they were in Nithari for more than a year without the police registering a case and investigating, when parents had alerted the police about their missing children? Where else in the world would the courts have had to intervene just to ensure that the police did start investigations?

Ghastly allegations of child sexual abuse, serial killing, Cannibalism, flesh trade, Organ Trade and Paedophilia are thrown against the so-called affluent business man, Moninder Singh Pandher,⁵³ and his servant Surendra Koli,³⁶.

Nithari, in fact, is an example of how the poor and the weak have just no place in the Indian

Continued on Page 6

Christmas Spirit Fills The Air!

Loyal to its tradition, the Organization for the Protection of Children's Rights (O.P.C.R.) welcomed on December 19th and 21st more than 700 children, aged between 6 and 8, to its fabulous Christmas Shows. It is in the O.P.C.R.'s mandate to invite underprivileged children from

Montreal and Quebec, Canada to a day filled with surprises. The St-Pascal Baylon, Petite-Patrie and Bourgeois-Champagnat schools from the Montreal region were invited at the Montreal-Longueuil Sandman Hotel. The Quebec region schools: Chanoine-Coté, Charles-Rodrigue, Du Versant and Ste-Genevieve and Notre-Dame de Foy Pavilions were invited at the Quebec Hilton Hotel.

This year, the atmosphere was magical with the arrival of Santa Claus in his gift filled sleigh, his nine reindeers and the Star Fairy. The children's eyes were all focused on Santa Claus and they did not miss a word he was saying. Our little guests were able to dance and play all day with the Clowns du Carrousel, the O.P.C.R.'s mascot PAMA, as well as Angus from Industrial Alliance, Bobo from the Brunet Pharmacies, Charl-O from the show L'École des fans courtesy of TVA and Chrystal Films, Safety Bear from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Mr. Fix from Fix Auto, The A&W Bear, Vigile from Surete du Quebec and SpongeBob SquarePants from Leslie Productions. Many activities were offered throughout the day such as the Clowns du



Face Painting activity at the Christmas Show

Carrousel Shows, the arts and crafts workshops, etc. After the delicious meal, the children were impatient to unwrap their gifts.

The hotel ballrooms were decorated especially for the Christmas Shows and our 120 volunteers also contributed to the Christmas magic.

The presents were enormous thanks to the collaboration of the O.P.C.R.'s many sponsors and donors. It is because of the tremendous generosity of our sponsors and donors that we are able once again to provide hundreds of underprivileged children with the opportunity of experiencing an unforgettable Christmas.

Most of the children who participate at our Christmas Shows come from families who are experiencing financial difficulties because of low income, unemployed parents, single parent family or a parent suffering from some type of dependency (alcohol, drugs, medication, etc). The children then may develop behavioural issues such as anxiety and lack of confidence in their future, they may have social insecurities and can experience sudden outbursts caused by an unbalanced family environment or lack of communication skills due to isolation. Poverty slows down the social, psychological and emotional development of children.

Some of the children who participate in our activities might suffer from psychological problems that are most likely caused by abandonment issues. Many children suffer in silence from the effects of the break-up of their family, violence, foster home transfers or Youth Protection cases, or are even saddened by the lack of attention from a parent. The repercussions of such situations are apparent in their behaviour, they are usually more aggressive, show a lack of interest in certain fields of activities, are sometimes depressed, unenthusiastic, insecure, etc. We cannot neglect how certain frustrations impact on the development of a child and how it can get worse as he/she grows older if nothing positive counteracts those disappointments. ■



Big Christmas gifts for the little ones

PROJECT KIRAN

Kites and Hopes flying high in the sky!

Every year the fourteenth of January marks the day of *Makar Sankranti* in the Hindu Calendar. Project Kiran decided to celebrate it with street children!!

Makar Sankranti is the only Hindu festival which is based on the Solar calendar rather than the Lunar calendar. Sankranti means to go from one place to another place (to change direction). It also means one meets another. It is marked as the time when the sun changes direction from one constellation (of the zodiac) to another during the winter solstice in the northern hemisphere (Uttarayana). Makar Sankranti is also known as KHICHADI (Indian dish made from rice and lentils) Sankranti because on this day the injunction to eat Khichadi, is generally observed by people. Seasonal crops become available. Ghee, and spices are used for making tasty nourishing Khichadi. Winter loosens its grip on shiver producing cold, admitting springtime that brings with it the chance for all round health improvement.

Since the festival is celebrated in the mid winter, the food prepared for this festival are such that they keep the body warm and give



Children and Volunteers try their hand at flying kites in the Kirti College Campus

high energy. In Maharashtra (state where Mumbai is located) it is called 'Tilgul'. When two Maharashtrians greet each other or visit each other during Makar Sankranti, they exchange ladoos made of sesame seeds (Called til gul, literally, sesame seeds and jaggery) - a special sweet made for this day and say, "til gul ghya, ani god god bola" (lit. take this til gul, and

always talk sweet). Sesame seeds and jaggery are important ingredients in this festival. In the state of Gujarat, north of Maharashtra, the festival is celebrated as Uttarayan. This is a kite-flying festival and in the state of Gujarat, it is almost an art. Kite fighting is a traditional Uttarayana activity: the kite flyer must keep his kite aloft while others attempt to sever his thread using their own kites. When someone wins the kite fight, his group celebrates with cheerful shouts and drum beatings. It is a common scene to see people play music, dance and socialize freely.

The festivities ended with Advocate Sadhana Mahashabde, Trustee, O.P.C.R. Mumbai, explaining to the children, the significance of Makar Sankranti and exchanging sweets made out of jaggery and sesame seeds.■

Updates

Fundraising for Project Kiran

Buy a card & bring hope to children!



This grass roots fund raising venture was initiated by O.P.C.R. Mumbai during the month of November.

Greeting Cards were created and printed from the paintings and craft work of children in Project Kiran. These are being sold by volunteers and students alike in the colleges of Mumbai.

You can support Project Kiran by buying these cards. For more details, contact Ms. Maitri Porecha - +91 9819026217/ maitryporecha@yahoo.co.in

Child Abuse in Nithari

system. However, this seems to be only the tip of the iceberg.

According to the National Crime Records Bureau: Child Rapes went up by a whopping 13.7% in 2005, while crimes against children went up by 3.8%.

Children form 42% of India's population and this population is definitely at high risk. Marginalised children, children of migrant workers and street children form a majority of the vulnerable population in India's case. Migrant workers and their children are not counted anywhere: neither in the census nor in any government scheme.

Child Trafficking is rampant. In India, as many as 45,000 children went missing in 2004 out of which 11,000 were not traced. These kids are easily lured from villages with the promises of employment in the urban areas. Many are forced into prostitution or work in sweat shops or as domestic help.

India has the largest number of street children in the world. What's needed is:

- A trained child protection officer in every police station (even in the remotest villages of India) to hear, register and take immediate action on any offence against children;
- Children related cases to be dealt with on a high priority basis and within a limited time frame;
- Spaces within communities and schools for children to report offences against them;
- Imbibing confidence amongst the children to speak up about the crimes committed against them.

So can the future Nitharis be avoided? Yes, definitely...But provided its lessons – and its victims – are not forgotten. ■

Children of Tibet

among the Tibetan youngsters, "If you throw a stone in Mcleodganj, it will surely hit an unemployed graduate."

Braving all hardships and difficulties these children don't hesitate to come out on the streets or storm the Chinese embassy or consulate to protest Chinese atrocities in Tibet with the only hope that people in the free world come out openly and support the non-violent struggle of the Tibetans and one day they will be able to return to their home - "A Free and a Democratic Tibet. ■

Violence against Children

The U.N. study on Violence Against Children is a landmark effort to provide a detailed global picture of the nature, extent and causes of violence against children, and propose clear recommendations for action to prevent and reduce such violence.

As the first report of its kind on this subject, the study is a critical tool to draw much-needed attention to a global problem. Ultimately the purpose of the study is to urge governments to fulfil their obligation to prevent and eliminate violence against children.

The study defines violence as the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, that results or is likely to result in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation.

The study focuses on the nature and extent of violence against children in home and family, educational settings, work situations, institutional settings, community and on the streets.

Several cross-cutting issues that increase a child's vulnerability to violence are also considered in the report, including violence in the media and other virtual settings, including child pornography, traditional harmful practices including female genital mutilation and early/forced marriage, violence against children from ethnic minorities, immigrant or migrant communities, violence against children infected with or affected by HIV/AIDS as also children as perpetrators of violence, including bullying. ■



A girl sits on the bundle of firewood in the Abu Shouk camp of displaced people in North Darfur, Sudan. Many women and girls are sexually abused or harassed when they go out to fetch food or water.

Message of the President

meal? Many orphans will opt to join the army as they are blinded by an illusion of pride, revenge, glory and most importantly, the long lost sense of belonging. But this path also has tremendous negative effects on a child's development as being a child soldier will further burden the adolescent in the long term. We will explore the phenomenon of child soldiers in the next Children Speak. ■