

**Statement from SOS-Kinderdorf International
to the follow-up to the Special Session of the General Assembly on Children,
December 11-12, 2007**

Millions of children around the world grow up without the care of their parents and even more are at risk of losing this care.

Our commitment towards children, their families and their communities

In more than 130 countries across the globe, SOS Children's Villages has developed programmes to reach not only the children without parental care but also those who are at risk of losing their parental care. **We work with these children, their families, and their communities, to help them stay together and strong.**

But challenges are diverse and complex. As society changes, issues change and they often merge to create problems that require a multifaceted solution. We follow these changes and analyse their effects on the lives of children, and to respond we have developed an "integrated approach" that tackles the diversity of problems they are confronted with. **This "integrated approach" consists of a package of services that are ultimately in the best interests of each child and his or her family.**

The first element of the integrated approach is family strengthening. We strongly believe that **children are best looked after by their biological or extended families.** For various reasons some families have difficulties in caring for their children. We work together with these families and strengthen their capacities to cope with their responsibilities. This may imply, for example, providing day care so mothers can work, or helping them to acquire marketable skills and finding jobs.

No child should be separated from his or her family because of poverty, marginalisation, poor health or a lack of education.

SOS Children's Village urges all stakeholders to take action to improve the situation of children without parental care, and in particular to:

1. Support and encourage the development of policies and actions aimed at strengthening the capacity of families to care for their children.

Wherever possible, children should remain in their own families and in their own communities. Efforts should aim to empower families to provide adequately for the

protection, care and development of their children and such efforts should draw on the complementary capacities of the State and civil society.

To ensure this, States should develop national policies that strengthen families, by providing subsidies and material assistance, including access to social and health services, child-sensitive family counselling services, education and adequate housing. In reality, children living in poverty are over-represented among those children separated from their parents, both in the developed and developing countries, and therefore national capacities must be strengthened to ensure access by poor families to services and safety nets needed to protect and care for their children.

Local multidisciplinary teams can better reach vulnerable families and to find individual solutions based on their actual situations. Thus, services should be directly accessible at community level and actively involve the participation of families as partners, supporting in particular the participation of children and women.

2. Support the development of quality standards for children in out-of-home care at national level

To ensure that children who are placed outside their families grow with dignity, and with full respect of their individuality and their fundamental rights, quality care standards for children in out-of-home care must be ensured. They should comply with those existing international standards developed by the United Nations (UN Guidelines on children without parental care), the Council of Europe (Recommendations on the rights of children in residential care) and some NGO initiatives, like the “Quality childcare provision” developed by Save the Children in East and Central Africa, or the “Quality4Children” standards developed in Europe through a joint initiative of FICE, IFCO and SOS Children’s Villages.

On that basis, States should adopt measures, including national action plans and guidelines or legislative measures, and create national monitoring and evaluation procedures.

3. Support and encourage States towards de-institutionalisation

De-institutionalisation is essentially the process of moving away from a care system based on large institutions. It involves restructuring the system of public care in order to diminish the use of institutions, develop alternative care approaches, and strengthen effective family- and community-based preventive and protective social services. The de-institutionalisation debate and process must be based on an understanding of the different policy elements involved in providing child care services, including prevention, maintaining an appropriate balance of provision, and ensuring that all alternative care is of a high standard.

In this regards, funds should be reallocated to prioritise preventive and family and community-based alternative care options. Action should also be taken to fight against discrimination that brings children into public care, in particular discrimination against children from minorities, children with disabilities, children with HIV/AIDS, etc.

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