

# **Afghanistan: A Glimpse at an Overwhelming Problem**

We have been in communication with Dr. Wais Aria of the Tabish Education/Health/Psychological/Social Counseling Project of Kabul, Afghanistan. Tabish protects and serves orphaned children as well women, the poor, and the disabled. We asked Dr. Aria if he could provide an initial statistical survey of Afghanistan's orphaned and abandoned children and he delivered the following details:

1) Roughly 8000 orphaned children live in both governmental and nongovernmental orphanages. Included in this number are abandoned and street children whom also reside in the same facilities (although the percentage is relatively low by comparison).

2) 50 % of the population of Afghanistan is under 19 years old due to thirty years of war, internal and external immigration, and poverty.

3) Due to economic hardship, parents also force their children into the following forms of work:

- Hard labor
- Begging – especially in the larger cities
- Enrollment in the military
- Joining a terrorist group
- Prostitution
- Marriage for dowry (most are under the age of 12)

4) In Kabul, a survey estimates that close to 7,000 children live and work in the streets. 81% of these children are male and 19 % are female. Among above children, 38% never went to school and do not have close family. Finally, 69 % of the total number of children surveyed work more than 8 hours a day and are drug abusers, sex workers, petty criminals, etc.

5) Orphanages face a complete lack of health, medical, and social services. Additionally, their children need love, psychological and social support, and hope for the future – of these basic human necessities there is absolutely nothing. In Kabul there are two orphanages: one cares for 200 children and the other another 700. Both orphanages house male and female children. Education is provided by more than 30 organizations, but none offer social services to give these children hope for the future and a normal life.

6) The following are priority items for the orphanages and their children:

- Facility for health care ( physical and psychosocial )
- Facility for shelter and first aid
- Awareness for nutrition
- Social support (protection from child marriage, forced prostitution, domestic violence, children's rights abuses, etc)
- Support of hobbies, especially for disabled, orphaned, and street worker children

- Educational support such as schools, teachers, educational material and coursework, etc
- Medical services
- Vocational training programs for those who can't study in school and have to support their family
- Support of social integration programs to help children improve their lives and develop a voice for their role in Afghan society.

The above facts and figures are preliminary, but give you an idea of how severe the situation has become for children in general in Afghanistan. We will continue to gather data to produce a more complete report later this year.