

# **Preliminary Child-Orphan Report: Gilgit-Baltistan**

## **Overview:**

This is a preliminary investigation into the statistics and medical needs of the orphaned children of the autonomous region of Gilgit-Baltistan of northern Pakistan (formerly known as the Northern Areas). The region is largely mountainous and has a population base approaching 1.8 million. Economic and employment opportunities are scarce and many of the remaining jobs are dangerous, resulting in the orphaning of children whom are often abandoned by the system and left to fend for themselves. The maternal mortality rate is high relative to the size of the population, and child abandonment remains a consistent problem. Inadequate funding and manpower limits government attention to the problems regarding orphaned and abandoned children. Action from the nonprofit sector remains below average.

## **Statistics:**

The lack of an adequate social services system prevents us from accurately determining the actual number of orphaned and abandoned children in Gilgit-Baltistan. Officially, there are two orphanages: the CEENA health and welfare organization, which is a home for roughly 103 children (consisting of both genders); and a center run by Pakistan Baitulmal, housing 100 boys between the ages of 4 and 6 years.

The unofficial number of privately-run orphanages and transition houses for abandoned children may run as high as 98, with a total number of children reaching over 2,300.

Official government statistics for the maternal mortality rate of Gilgit-Baltistan is 600 per 100,000 births. Other sources have declared a higher rate of 70 per 1,000 births.

## **Initial Proposal for Improvement:**

The Fishermen proposes working with authorities from the health and education departments of Gilgit-Baltistan as well as fellow NGOs to:

- a) Determine the actual number of orphaned and abandoned children within the region of Gilgit-Baltistan,
- b) Identify the unofficial and privately-run orphanages and transition houses for abandoned children and establish contact to determine legitimacy,
- c) Catalog the medical and educational needs of all orphanages and transition houses,
- d) Address the issue of maternal mortality by increasing attention to the needs of community health clinics and regional hospitals, and
- e) Initiate a campaign to raise funds for the overall improvement of the health and education of the orphaned and abandoned children of Gilgit-Baltistan.

It is the intention of The Fishermen to dispatch a fact-finding mission to the medical facilities and orphanages of Gilgit-Baltistan later this year to verify numbers and needs. Thus far, we have

made a preliminary healthcare assessment for orphanages based on comments made by administrators with whom we are able to communicate. The following are the items that are of primary medical importance:

- a) First aid kits,
- b) Medication for colds and influenza,
- c) Medication to treat eczema and scabies, and
- d) Common hygiene products such as soap, hand sanitizer, feminine products, and toothbrushes and toothpaste.

### **Conclusion:**

Though the region of Gilgit-Baltistan is relatively small, the rugged terrain and lack of adequate government services increases the difficulty of engaging the complex social, economic, educational, and medical needs of its orphaned and abandoned children. Successfully addressing these problems will require the assistance of the global community to include UN agency support and the attention of NGOs with expertise operating in mountainous terrain. Although the above information is only preliminary, as we continue to verify data both from abroad and on the ground we will provide updates on our discoveries so that support will be provided for *actual* numbers and issues rather than speculative.