

U.S.-based NGOs asked to help halt spiraling orphan crisis amid Iraq's nation-building efforts

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WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Iraqi leaders including Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki have taken initial steps to avert an unparalleled orphan crisis by supporting the link between an Iraqi orphan initiative and two U.S.-based non-governmental organizations.

The joint effort brings together Iraq-based Sponsor Iraqi Orphan Foundation (SIOF) with Sponsor Iraqi Children Foundation (SICF) of Falls Church, Va., and The Children's Village of New York.

The two U.S.-based nonprofit organizations have set a rare training session in early 2010 for Iraq's national and community-based care providers to build high-performing organizations. The U.S. organizations met with 30 orphan organizations Oct. 4 and 5 to set plans in motion.

Predictions are that the unparalleled number of orphans in Iraq resulting from war and violence could cause insurmountable social problems in succeeding generations. Iraq has an estimated 2.5 million orphans. One in 10 Iraqis is a young orphan. Only about 1 in 1,000 orphans receives services beyond food and shelter.

"Iraqi leaders believe their country's orphans of today will potentially be a torrent of street beggars, criminals and even militants of tomorrow," said Maxwell Quqa, SICF president and former advisor to Iraqi-based diplomatic and military personnel.

The crisis is the result of adult deaths during years of violence and war. The loss of scores of male Iraqis in this paternalistic Muslim country also left a multitude of widows too destitute to care for their children.

In 2007, Quqa felt compassion for orphans he noticed on the streets of Baghdad and joined with an equally concerned Dr. Ali AIDabbagh, a leading spokesman of the Iraqi government, to seek solutions.

Maliki voiced support Oct. 6, stating, "I pledge to you to give the NGOs of Iraq all needed support. We will give you [Iraqi NGOs] a semi-official status and will do all we can to help you to remedy Iraqi orphans crisis." The meeting was broadcast live on national Iraqi TV.

CV will provide fundamental training on trauma recovery, child development, foster care, extended family assimilation of orphans, organizational leadership and administration.

"The most vulnerable Iraqi today – the orphan – demands our most immediate attention," said Jeremy Kohomban, president and CEO of Children's Village.

The October trip was made possible by generous corporate donations from Triple Canopy, The Almco Group and BH Defense.

For more information, visit www.sicfiraq.org or call 703-953-4919.

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