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Amid the Chaos of U.S. Adoptions in Haiti, Friends of the Orphans and Nos Petits Frères et Soeurs Strive to Restore Order, Protect the Children

Organizations carefully monitor and identify whether children are orphaned or abandoned by the earthquake before moving forward with any type of formal processes

CHICAGO—August 16, 2010—Recent media reports have blasted organizations’ botched attempts at helping vulnerable, displaced or orphaned children in Haiti, casting a major shadow over organizations like Friends of the Orphans and Nos Petits Frères et Soeurs, whose staff and volunteers are working diligently to ensure the safety and wellbeing of victims.

Although many of the news reports cover adoptions that started off as well-meaning, others were ripe with fraud and scandal. In some cases, children were being adopted without valid reason or proof of identity or even given to families who had *not* been screened prior to the adoption or who no longer wanted to adopt. The result has forced dozens of children—many with potential family members looking for them in Haiti—into foster care or juvenile care centers in the U.S.

“The chaos surrounding the children is devastating,” said Sharon Saxelby, president and CEO of Friends of the Orphans. “It’s bad enough they have either been separated from or lost their loved ones and homes in Haiti. To bring them into the U.S., a foreign country, and shift them from one foster home to the next...it’s inexcusable.”

To help protect the thousands of vulnerable and displaced children as a result of the earthquake, Chicago-based nonprofit organization Friends of the Orphans and Haiti-based Nos Petits Frères et Soeurs (NPFS, French for “Our Little Brothers and Sisters”) created a program called *Father Wasson Angels of Light*.

Through 15 day camps and various outreach programs, *Father Wasson Angels of Light* staff and volunteers carefully monitor children affected by the earthquake and identify whether they are abandoned or orphaned. Set up at St. Damien—a free pediatric hospital

in Tabarre—and in numerous tent cities sprawled throughout the capital, the camps feature community engagement and educational activities that provide shelter, medical care and food for the children. Friends of the Orphans and NPFS then determine each child’s social situation, providing a safe haven in their live-in Child Protection Camp or integrating them into the larger NPFS family at the St. Helene orphanage in Kenscoff.

“*Angels of Light* is a wonderful, humane way to get to know the children and their circumstances before any formal process is begun,” said Saxelby. “Ever since the earthquake hit in January, the number of orphans in Haiti has dramatically increased. Although the exact numbers are unknown, Friends of the Orphans staff, volunteers, and donors have proven invaluable to the *Angels of Light* program and the children it supports.”

Founded in January, *Angels of Light* currently feeds 2,500 children per day through donations from the World Food Program. In October, the organization hopes to open its first primary school for children, which will create space for 700 students and about 60 jobs.

Said NPH International’s Information Officer Monica Gery, “The school represents one of the many terrific ways Friends of the Orphans and NPFS are not only addressing the short-term needs of the children, but the long-term needs as well. Haiti is desperate for schools, and the educational plans orchestrated through *Angels of Light* are a significant and exciting step towards recovery.”

According to the Haitian government, more than 300,000 homes were destroyed or damaged in January’s 7.0 magnitude earthquake. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, eight hospitals were destroyed, 22 hospitals were seriously damaged, and more than 3,000 schools collapsed. Although the numbers are devastating, Friends of the Orphans and Nos Petits Frères et Soeurs are working around the clock to address the country’s severe challenges and administer solutions.

“Amid Haiti’s chaotic landscape, it is unfortunate that reports about organizations acting in unethical, irresponsible ways must overshadow all of the good work being accomplished by individuals working tirelessly on behalf of the children,” said Saxelby.

She added, “We are so very grateful for the continued support of our donors—individuals and corporations—who have allowed us to positively transform the lives of hundreds of children here in Haiti and throughout Latin America. We look forward to touching the lives of many more and bringing further stability to Haiti.”

To learn more about NPFS or the *Father Wasson Angels of Light* program and how to donate, visit www.friendsoftheorphans.org.

BACKGROUND:

Chicago-based Friends of the Orphans and Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos International (NPH) transform the lives of orphaned, abandoned and disadvantaged children in nine Latin American and Caribbean countries, including Haiti. NPH's presence in Haiti includes the St. Helene orphanage with 350 children, various community and education programs and the country's only free pediatric hospital, St. Damien's. Last year, NPH's hospital and outreach programs' staff and volunteers treated more than 30,000 children and adults.

Since its founding in 1954 by Father William B. Wasson, NPH has assisted nearly 16,000 children and currently cares for more than 3,600 in Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua and Peru. For more information about Friends of the Orphans, please visit www.friendsoftheorphans.org.

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