

17 November 2006

**Statement of H.E. Ms. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa,
President of the 61st Session of the General Assembly,
before the “Global Children Gala”**

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Good evening.

I am very honored and grateful to be here tonight.

At the outset, I would like to express my pleasure at becoming a member of the Global Advisory Board for Orphans International Worldwide. I would also like to thank, Aux Antilles and the Arab Club for inviting me to participate in the "Global Children Gala". Allow me to commend the various UN agencies, in particular UNICEF for their dedication in support for the cause of children in need.

I would also like to welcome the Egyptian movie star Ms. Laila Eloui. Her presence reaffirms the role that celebrities can play to highlight the importance of collective engagement if we are to make a difference in the lives of millions, especially orphan children.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The world today faces a number of pressing challenges.

Armed conflicts, the AIDS epidemic, natural disasters, low health standards and abject poverty threaten global security. Under these conditions orphans, particularly those living in the developing world are often left off the agenda.

However, orphaned children are among the most vulnerable and least cared for group. They need our assistance. Many face further discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity or disability. Orphaned children are often denied their right to protection, and to be treated as children in a loving environment.

There are nearly 39 Million orphans in Africa, 61.5 in Asia, and 8 in Latin America. While the overall number of orphans is expected to decrease by the year 2010, in Africa it is expected to rise to 42 million.

It is encouraging to acknowledge the commitment of Member States to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Secretary General's Study on Violence Against Children, and the implementation of the Security Council resolution on Children and Armed Conflicts

Much more is needed though if we are to reverse the current situation and make a real difference in the lives of orphans. To accelerate progress we will need to:

- Achieve the MDGs and the broader aims of the Millennium Declaration as a means to transform the lives of millions of children. Including, by providing universal access to essential services, such as clean water and primary schooling.
- Harmonize national laws with international commitments to children.
- Strengthen institutions that deal with children and encourage child focused budgets.

These objectives may not be attained without genuine partnerships.

Partnerships that bring together states from the developing and developed worlds along with NGOs and the private sector.

NGOs also have a significant role to play. They provide homes; physical and emotional care, education, and help orphans integrate into society. I would like to commend Orphans International for their work in the developing world, which is often carried out in difficult circumstances. Their commitment is both inspiring and essential.

In closing, I would like to take this opportunity to invite you all to reaffirm your commitment to provide a better life for all children. Only by enabling orphans to lead a normal life, can we give our societies the opportunity to life in greater dignity, free from want and fear.

And finally, I would like to congratulate everyone who will shortly be presented with awards for there good work in this field.

I wish you all success in your noble endeavor.

Thank you.