



# Creating a safe haven for orphans of AIDS

In a special 2003 edition on "European Heroes" Time Magazine described (Countess) **ALBINA DU BOISROUVRAY** as an "alchemist" who turned private pain and personal wealth into loving care for the estimated 100 million AIDS orphans and vulnerable children. **Marie Benoit** asks this very busy woman a few questions

The poorest countries in the world are also often the hardest hit by the AIDS pandemic. In the chaos of poverty and disease, children end up neglected and abandoned when their parents fall sick. Poverty erodes the ability of grandparents, siblings and neighbours – the social safety net that would normally be in place – to take in these children and raise them. A personal tragedy – the death of her only child at the age of 24 during a helicopter mission in Mali – precipitated a dramatic change in her life and led her to walk away from a successful career as a film producer to champion the cause of the tens of millions of vulnerable children left in the wake of the devastating AIDS pandemic. She set up the FXB International named after her only son François Xavier Bagnoud.

You will be in Malta next Thursday 7 May on the occasion of World AIDS Orphans Day. Could you tell us more about this day?

FXB International began in 2002, a day dedicated to orphans of AIDS. The idea behind it is to attract attention to the distress of millions of orphans. Every 7 May, a voice is given to these millions without a voice through a day of solidarity and sensibilisation. In Malta the French Embassy together with the mayors of Malta are involved in the organisation of this day. FXB has initiated a world-wide coalition of mayors because it is the guardians of the Rights of the Child in their municipalities who can involve their town on the road of respect of the rights of the most vulnerable children. It is these guardians who can put pressure on their government to give at least 10% of funds allocated to the fight against AIDS. These funds should be utilised specifically for the orphans and children affected by this pandemic. The money is mostly used to support the families and the communities who are responsible for these children. The two-fold crisis of poverty and AIDS considerably affects the possibility of communities to protect these children and to bring them up. More than 800 mayors and others elected from 41 countries have already joined this coalition and this includes the mayors of Malta.

Your association this year is celebrating 20 years of support to the orphans of AIDS. Could you explain your mission?

I founded FXB International in 1989 to help the orphans of AIDS and also vulnerable children via community economic development programmes. Every 15 seconds around the world, AIDS kills a father and a mother. Today there are 15 million identified orphans of AIDS. If they are not helped it means that we are ignoring a whole generation of children. In 20 years, some 800,000 children in 20 countries across the world have benefi-

ted from the programmes of FXB International.

How does FXB help them in a concrete way?

When children no longer have parents, when their neighbours and their family are too poor to care for them, they run the risk of finding themselves stigmatised and exposed to sickness and all forms of violence and exploitation such as prostitution, forced labour, drugs, terrorism and enrolment in the army.

It is to avoid that this generation, which has been spared, is not excluded from society that FXB has created a method of global intervention which allows these children and the communities which are looking after them, to come out of poverty. FXB is community based and encourages constant dialogue with the population. When their parents die the children are taken care of by an extended family or their community. FXB has thus set up the FXB village. It is composed of a network made up of 80 to 100 families – some 500 recipients – who are directly touched by poverty and AIDS. This programme makes it possible to help the recipients towards economic and social autonomy in three years. The children are integrated thanks to income-generating activities such as the breeding of animals, running small shops and similar activities which make it possible to provide for the needs of the families. At the same time FXB goes

on helping the recipients by improving their access to sanitary, educational, medical and economic services. Women play an important role in these villages and they have my trust. I have confidence in them. For 20 years FXB International has helped to make these children productive and happy men and women.

Are you optimistic today?

Today I am indignant at the myopia of the world, indignant at the lack of a sense of responsibility with regard to a generation of orphans of AIDS. But next Thursday, with the commitment of the mayors of Malta, it is new proof that we can take heart, that not everyone is turning away and that our world can also be supportive and fraternal. So yes, I am happy and proud to be in Malta and I hope that this day of sensibilisation will be an opportunity for organisations like ours to receive donations because there is so much to be done....

For further information and to make a donation to FXB please go to [www.fxb.org](http://www.fxb.org)

This is a free translation by Marie Benoit from the French original. Madame du Boisrouvray will give a talk at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Valletta next Thursday 7 May at 6:30pm during a Conference entitled: "FXB and AIDS Orphans".

