

European hero tells Malta of AIDS orphans' plight

Countess Albina du Boisrouvray was the special guest of the Today Public Policy Institute this week, where she presented an overview of the work of the Association François-Xavier Bagnoud (AFXB) she founded, with AIDS orphans.

The activity, organized with the help the French Embassy to Malta, was held at the Chamber of Commerce.

Albina du Boisrouvray was born in 1941 in Paris, and she is a former journalist and film producer who has become a global philanthropist and social entrepreneur working with AIDS orphans. She is a grandchild of the Bolivian King of Tin, Simón Patiño, who was one of the wealthiest men in the world at the time of her birth.

After working variously as a model, actress and freelance journalist, she established a film production company in 1969 and is credited with producing eleven movies. These include *Fort Saganne* (1984), directed by Alain Corneau and starring Gérard Depardieu.

She was made Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres in 1985 and also became the first film producer to be awarded L'Ordre National du Mérite.

A personal tragedy – the death of her only child, François-Xavier Bagnoud, 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. In addition to her film-producing company, she sold most of her



personal assets and joined Bernard Kouchner of Médecins du Monde for two years, accompanying him on a mission to Lebanon.

Since then, she has devoted all her energy, creativity, solid experience and credibility as an entrepreneur, to humanitarian causes as well as social development and research on numerous projects worldwide.

In financing the establishment of FXB in 1989, she sold a large part of her assets. These included a jewellery collection auctioned by Sotheby's in New York for \$31.2 million, an art collection of \$20 million, and a substantial part of her family real-estate business which fetched \$50 million. Her philanthropy and humanitarian efforts earned her a knighthood of the Legion d'Honneur in 2001.

Countess du Boisrouvray made a presentation of the AFXB and its mission, which is to fight poverty and AIDS and to support orphans and vulnerable children left in the wake of the AIDS pandemic. It advocates for their fundamental rights, and today AFXB leads over 100 programs in Africa, the Americas, Asia and Europe, with a network of 42 countries.

She suggested that Malta, being at the forefront of the discussions on water and climate change issues, could also be a leader at the UN in mobilizing other countries and push in finding programs through which money is spent more appropriately to alleviate the emotional and practical suffering of these children.

In 2002, FXB International founded World AIDS Orphans Day to draw attention to the plight of millions of children orphaned and made vulnerable by AIDS around the world. Every 7 May, FXB and a coalition of advocates raise awareness of the plight of these children.

Countess du Boisrouvray said that in 2007, UNAIDS officially estimated that 15 million children worldwide had been orphaned by AIDS – equivalent to the number of people living in New York, Paris, and Bangkok combined. In sub-Saharan Africa alone, over 12 million children have been orphaned by the pandemic.

“They are the just the tip of the iceberg, as millions more children have been orphaned due to other causes and of millions of vulnerable children, who drift away from civilization. Not helping them is the same as not raising a whole generation of children and future adults.”

She also said the needs of children affected by AIDS are neglected. Despite progress in funding, preventing and treating AIDS, poor families are supporting affected children with minimal assistance, including from their governments.

“Few resources are reaching the families and communities that provide the front-line response, even though they provide the vast majority of care and support to orphaned

and vulnerable children. A generation will be lost if we do not take urgent measures to support the basic rights of children, and the families and communities that care for them.”

Experts believe that millions more orphans remain unaccounted for in India, China and Russia. By 2010, the number of AIDS orphans worldwide is expected to reach at least 20 million.

AFXB seeks to help AIDS orphans worldwide and provides support to their communities. The FXB-Villages are community-based, time-bound, and sustainable response to the AIDS orphans crisis and extreme poverty. Each village supports 80-100 families, comprised of approximately 500 individuals, mostly children. By 2008 FXB had launched over 40 villages and has active villages in Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, India and Thailand. It now has projects in China, India, Myanmar, Thailand, Burundi, Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda, Brazil, Colombia, Uruguay and Switzerland.

ASSOCIATION FRANÇOIS-XAVIER BAGNOUD

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