

STREET CHILDREN

A growing urban tragedy

This report for the Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues¹ deals with a long-standing yet hitherto largely unacknowledged problem: the street children, whose number has risen to over 30 million.

Published as a paperback by Weidenfeld & Nicolson Ltd, the report—an extremely comprehensive survey—is addressed, as stressed in the introduction by Sadruddin Aga Khan and Hassan bin Talal, Co-Chairmen of the Commission, “...not only to policy makers, but to the widest possible readership (young people in particular). Street children are primarily a matter for communities, not experts.”

In the prologue, Mrs. Agnelli, Convener of the ICIHI Working Group on Children, utters a cry of alarm: “Millions of street children who live alone, undernourished..., who are denied affection..., who survive by expedients... coalesce into gangs and re-invent a family, a structure they have never known, a security that always eluded them. Children... used unscrupulously by others, mistreated, imprisoned... who see grown-ups as their enemies. ... As the big cities grow, so will the number of street children. So will deprivation which begets frustration which begets violence.”

The report, fully corroborating her concern, first features the profiles of some street children and describes the geographic distribution of the phenomenon prevalent not only in developing but also in industrial countries where, although genuine street children are a rarity, street youngsters are far from rare.

After reporting on real-life cases, the authors assess the ravages caused by life in the streets, then go on to analyse the process of exclusion, the authorities' attitude and the many facets of humane response.

The last two chapters deal with prevention (various suggestions are made to this effect) and concrete action (including recommendations directed at governments, local communities and the media).

It is to be hoped that the study, which includes contributions by many persons famous throughout the world for their charisma, will achieve to the full its authors' objective: to increase awareness of the street children's plight and to encourage tangible action in support of the efforts made by a number of governmental and non-governmental agencies, both at national and international level.

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¹ *Street children—A growing urban tragedy*, Report for the Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues presented by Susanna Agnelli, published by George Weidenfeld & Nicolson Limited, London, 1986, 123 pages.