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Haiti orphanages hotspot of child trafficking, abuse, says charity

Anastasia Moloney, Reuters

Posted at Jun 23 2017 08:00 AM | Updated as of Jun 23 2017 08:27 AM

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BOGOTA - Children living in hundreds of orphanages in Haiti suffer sexual and physical abuse and some are trafficked into orphanages for profit, according to a charity founded by "Harry Potter" author J.K. Rowling.

Many of Haiti's orphanages use deception to recruit children from unknowing and impoverished parents - a form of trafficking - and use those children to attract donations, said the report released on Thursday by the London-based charity Lumos.

Donors, mostly from the United States and faith-based organisations, give \$70 million a year to one-third of Haiti's 750 orphanages, it said.

About 30,000 children live in orphanages in Haiti, even though four in five of those children have at least one living parent, Lumos said. Most orphanages are privately funded.

Impoverished families are frequently duped into giving up their children by orphanage directors who hire so-called child-finders and local pastors who also seek out children, it said.

In some cases, families had been paid \$75 to give their children away, the report said.

"Many parents are deceived into giving up their children, purely so that unscrupulous individuals can make a profit," said Lumos Chief Executive Georgette Mulheir in a statement.

"Well-intended donors give vast sums to orphanages. But 80 percent of children living there are not orphans," she said.

Taking children from their parents through deception, coercion or purchase is a form of human trafficking going largely unchecked, said the report released at Haiti's first anti-trafficking conference this week in Port-au-Prince.

In a country where one in four people lives on \$1.23 a day, extreme poverty drives families to sell or give their children to orphanages on false promises they will receive an education, food or care, Lumos said.

Lumos interviewed 44 children who had been raised in orphanages as well as former orphanage volunteers, health care workers and government officials.

Some children reported beatings and cold water being dumped on toddlers who were forced to sleep on an orphanage floor.

One 19-year-old man with a physical disability told Lumos he was regularly beaten at an orphanage that he left in 2015.

"They would use a stick or an electric cord to hit you, wherever on your body," he said. "Sometimes they would hit you and you'd bleed."

Lumos said it found evidence in the past two years that sexual abuse in orphanages occurs, saying such cases "rarely come to light." Even if such cases are reported and investigated, they rarely result in justice for victims, it said.

The charity urged donors to redirect funds away from Haiti's orphanages.

It suggested spending money instead on improving foster care and local adoption programs and helping families look after their children by funding schooling and housing projects.

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Amelie Baron, Agence France-Presse

Posted at Mar 13 2017 07:39 AM

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Haiti bus accident. *AFP*

GONAIVES, Haiti - A bus speeding away from a hit-and-run accident plowed into dozens of street musicians in northern Haiti on Sunday, killing 34 people, officials said.

Seventeen people also were injured in Gonaives, a city of some 300,000 people located about 150 kilometers (90 miles) northwest of the capital Port-au-Prince.

"First, the bus plowed into two pedestrians, killing one of them, and injuring the other," Marie-Alta Jean Baptiste, head of Haiti's civil protection office, told AFP.

The driver then rammed into three groups of street musicians as he tried to speed away, leaving 33 of them dead in a scene of ghastly carnage. Another 17 people were being treated at hospitals.

Police were forced to control an angry crowd after the grisly incident in Haiti, the poorest country in the Americas.

"The people who were not victims of the accident tried to burn the bus with the passengers inside," said Faustin Joseph, civic protection coordinator for the department of Artibonite, where Gonaives, the regional capital, is located.

The Blue Sky bus line, a private company offering long-distance routes, is a more upscale option for travel compared to the packed former American school buses that commonly ply the roads in Haiti.

Authorities initially said they had detained the bus driver, but he had actually fled the scene, Gonaives traffic chief Jeudy Lisate told AFP.

Police were still trying to identify him.

It's not known what caused the crash, which occurred on a straight stretch of road without any potholes.

On Sunday afternoon a heavily damaged car was seen in a ditch on the side of the road, but the accident scene had otherwise been cleaned up.

In a statement Haitian President Jovenel Moise "expressed his deep sadness following the terrible accident."

"The head of state conveys, on behalf of the whole government, his sincere condolences to the families and those close to the victims," the statement read.

Moise called for "an investigation as soon as possible to shine light on this tragedy."

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