

Trip to Kazakhstan 26-29 November 2004

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We would like to provide our members with the information which we were able to collect during our visit, having been able to make contact with various authorities and people related with Father Guido's activity.

The **current situation** is starting to become more understandable, even if the government methods are somewhat "brutal".

There is a general tendency towards expulsion of Russians from all public organisations, in favour of Kazakhs. At some future point, proficiency in the Kazakh language could become a discriminatory factor for acceptance to some administrative jobs or even for the right to permanency in the country. In the specific sector of childcare, they want to increase the weight of the State and to render the activities of third parties dependant on the State, in various ways.

After the first days of absolute confusion, with the government offices incapable of providing reasons for the recent events (ordering the children to be returned to the State Orphanages) and in complete contradiction between themselves, yesterday (25 November) some news from the Ministry of Education at Astana' arrived which states that in the presence of sanitary and scholastic "licenses" and upon compliance to various specific regulations on conforming with standards (upon which Guido and his legal advisors are currently working) authorisation will be given to return the children.

The bureaucratic timeframes for licenses, with all of the necessary supporting documents, are not the shortest, but it should be possible to obtain them before Christmas.

Therefore, although it is best not to be too optimistic, at least now a solution seems possible.

Local frame of mind in relation to the situation

The local officials and the population in general, under the influence of 70 years of soviet culture, do not see any problem with the current situation; according to them, the children of the Orphanage have everything that they need; shelter, food, clothes, medical care and therefore there is no problem. They do not understand why some Italians should be interested in the well being of Kazak children. Furthermore that there are people from Italy sending money and supplies and worrying about the children is incomprehensible.

They keep asking Guido what the real reason for all of this is and what is the benefit to the Italians.

There is, therefore, a veritable cultural barrier which makes things more difficult.

The real situation escapes them, as they do not look beyond appearances. The children are deprived of stimuli, they dine at 6pm and go to bed at 6.30pm. They DO NOT receive any schooling, they don't know what affection is, they do not learn a profession and at 18 years old it is a well known fact that they are turned out onto the street without any preparation. The result: they become easy prey for delinquency and add fall into a life of crime. These elements are not considered or understood by local bureaucracy.

The results of diplomatic intervention.

The Italian Prime Minister's letter has been delivered and read by the addressee. We are waiting to see what will develop from this, if things (as they seem) take a favourable turn in the near future, a written response will not be necessary. If this does not occur it will be necessary to explain to our Prime Minister why it is not possible to do anything. It will take about another two weeks before we can evaluate our next move.

Visit to the children at the state orphanage on November 27th 2004

The children with no parents or relations have been returned to the state orphanage. Guido visits them every day but their situation is very delicate. They were very happy to see Guido and the visit of friends from Italy created a festive atmosphere, but it was obvious that something is missing.

Everyone, particularly Anvar, kept asking Guido 'when are we returning home?' and, Guido, like he does every day, was only able to make very vague promises.

Only 8 children which had been entrusted to Arca by the council of Talgar, and originating from families 'at risk', now remain. We saw Nastia again, she came to lunch with us. She now lives a few km from Talgar with a relation who reluctantly takes care of her while waiting for the situation to be resolved.

In the event of a positive outcome to the situation, the position of the children still registered at the state orphanages should be resolved automatically. For all the others who have a parent or relation with paternal authority the legal situation will have to be evaluated on a case by case basis taking into account each different family situation, the possible absence of the child or guardian's documents, their 'category' (orphan, disabled, child from 'at risk' family).

Visit to the state orphanage on November 28th 2004

In the afternoon, after having accompanied Nastia back to her relation, we returned to Almaty to see the children again, they manifested their joy in seeing us again as only they know how! There were two significant episodes: Anvar asked me, in his own peculiar version of Italian, 'when are we returning home?' then the children, knowing that I had some photos of Talgar in my digital camera, flocked around me to see them, exclaiming 'home', 'home'. They pointed out the familiar faces of the children who are still there, calling them by name – a touching episode.

Punctually at 18.30 all the children had to go to bed.

Number of children involved

At the moment only 8 of the original 48 children who were at Talgar are still there. 15 are in a state orphanage and 25 are temporarily with their parents or relations. The 12 who were at Almaty were also temporarily moved back to their parents or relations.

Conclusions

We can't say that we have good news, but we think that events might be beginning to move forward and that there might be the possibility of a positive outcome. We also know that, while Arca is the only organisation which has been asked to return the children, another similar organisation in Almaty has also been asked for licences.

