

Dorine Thomissen

Van: Yvonne Coenders [y.coenders@sra.rechtsbijstand.net]
Verzonden: maandag 10 juni 2002 10:27
Aan: Dorine Thomissen
Onderwerp: FW: orphanages in China

Beste Dorine,

zoals beloofd stuur ik je hierbij de (eerste) reactie van Robin Munro op het ambtsbericht van Buitenlandse Zaken over weeshuizen in China. Ik heb deze passages gisteren tevens aan Human Rights Watch gezonden. Zodra ik een relevante reactie krijg, zal ik je die toesturen.

groeten,

Yvonne Coenders
 SRA NO NL

-----Oorspronkelijk bericht-----

Van: Robin Munro [mailto:rm@seag.ac.uk]
Verzonden: zaterdag 8 juni 2002 19:59
Aan: Yvonne Coenders
Onderwerp: RE: orphanages in China

Dear Yvonne,

Many thanks for sending me this translation of the Dutch MoJ report on Chinese orphanages. I've been very busy lately, but have now read the document through quickly and would just make the following few comments at this point. (I'll try to send you a more detailed response to it later.)

It's very hard for me to assess the factual quality of this report, since it's based mainly on Dutch embassy visits to a few individual orphanages, and to my mind there is no sign in the report that the Dutch officials have made any serious attempt to really investigate the accuracy (or otherwise) of the very serious charges of institutional abuse that HRW made in its 1996 report *Death by Default* and which many other observers have also made over the years.

I have no doubt that the Dutch officials have reported accurately on what they actually saw in the orphanages they visited. But they really shouldn't be naive enough to think that what they personally saw is, necessarily, in any way representative of what goes on inside these institutions for the other 364 days of the year, when no "foreign dignitaries" are present there. Chinese officials are past masters at staging "model visits" for the benefit of foreign guests. (Sentences in the report like "Orphan care centre quality in China is not of a universally high standard" are, in my view, disgracefully euphemistic – and they show a lamentable lack of sincerity on the Dutch officials' part in actually addressing (still less independently investigating) the well-documented and widespread abusive conditions in China's orphanage system.)

The Chinese government has been very well-sensitized to the international concern about conditions in Chinese orphanages since *Death by Default* first appeared, and therefore no one could seriously expect that it would allow foreign diplomatic visitors into a few selected institutions without first taking steps to ensure that everything in these institutions looked basically quite acceptable. The real issue – which the Dutch report entirely ignores – is that the overwhelming majority of Chinese orphanages and other places where homeless infants and children are kept are still, to this day, barred to all foreign visitors or to any form of outside monitoring and scrutiny. It's surely not rocket science to figure out why this should be.

Rather than writing a report based on a series of one-off, brief visits to a few selected institutions, it would have been much more honest of the Dutch authorities to state

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clearly, at the outset, that they have absolutely no idea of the conditions currently obtaining in the vast majority of Chinese orphanages and other institutions for homeless children, and then to qualify their remarks on what they actually observed during these few visits by pointing out that, at the very least, they recognize that the particular institutions they visited were most likely "spruced up" or "sanitized" well in advance of the visits. Diplomats are, after all, supposed to be highly intelligent, independent-minded and down-to-earth people, and one can therefore only regard their failure, in this report, to do any of these things as a sign of either investigative sloppiness or undelying disingenuousness on their part.

Extensive and meticulous descriptions of the physical interiors and general facilities of the places they visited (e.g. references to sports grounds, numbers of staff and inmates, etc) are no substitute for this kind of vitally necessary investigative effort, and if such an effort was in practice entirely beyond the abilities of the Dutch embassy officials, then they should have acknowledged this fact openly and frankly – rather than simply avoiding the real questions altogether, as I feel they have chosen to do in this report.

best regards,

Robin

-----Original Message-----

From: Yvonne Coenders [mailto:y.coenders@sra.rechtsbijstand.net]

Sent: Wednesday 29 May 2002 10:05

To: 'Robin Munro'

Subject: RE: orphanages in China

Dear mr. Munro,

In february I have asked you some questions concerning orphanages in China. It has taken some time, but at last I can send you the relevant pieces of the report of the Dutch Ministry of Justice concerning orphanages in China that you asked for. I think you will find some sentences in this report quite surprising...

Of course I am interested in your reaction concerning this report. I am planning to ask HRW also for an official reaction. Could you please mail me the e-mail address of Sidney Jones? Until now I didn't receive a reaction of him on my mail that you forwarded to him in february.

Greetings,

Yvonne Coenders
Legal Aid Agency the Netherlands