

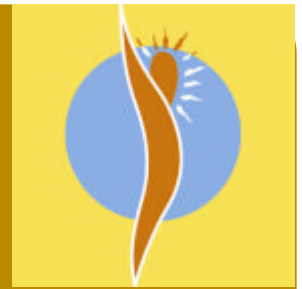
... a depression is one of the few diseases in which you feel worse in the morning and better in the evening? That's why we are called Morning Tears!

.... nearly all children who stayed in Children Village for 6 months are back on their standard weight?

... 2162 is the number of defendants found not guilty in China in 2005 – a 98% conviction rate, among the highest in the world

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Newsletter

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Editorial

The protection of vulnerable children is often left in the hands of private initiatives such as Children Village.

For the protection of left behind children there should be a control organism that takes care of what happens to those children. And this role should be given to the state. But what if the state does not exercise any control? What if the state does not take up its responsibility in protecting and caring for these children left behind?

In this case private initiatives will fill up part of the gap. Most of these initiatives have social and humanitarian motives, but without any control it is quite obvious that there will also be organizations with less noble motives...

The state should protect its citizens and more in particular the most vulnerable groups such as children whose parents are imprisoned or executed.

Ideally, the state should fulfil the basic role and provide the care that is normally given by parents. Often developing nations push forward the argument of financial constraints to justify the lack of this level of protection. Their priorities seem to be elsewhere: economic growth, military strength, space development... But anyhow, if providing basic care is not possible then there should be at least a systematic and structural control of private child care initiatives.

To push governments from all countries on one hand and to support them bringing control mechanisms into place are core tasks of organizations like Morning Tears.

Koen Sevenants,

on behalf of the children, their caregivers and the Morning Tears team

New in Children Village

- From January 28th until February 12th 2006, the children celebrated the traditional Chinese New Year in Children Village with plenty of food and fireworks. Many volunteers visited bringing gifts for the children.
- Three children joined Children Village right after Chinese Spring Festival. The three of them are boys, the youngest is 11, and the other two are 13 years old.
- In March about 20 volunteer college students came to Children Village re-level the ground.
- Caregivers, teachers and a few children had a meeting from the 16th until the 18th of January, in order to discuss the future of Children Village. This resulted in a 3 years strategic plan. You will find more detail about this on the following pages.

Strategic plan for Children Village for the following years

Last January Morning Tears and Children Village had a meeting to discuss the future of the cooperation. Teachers and caregivers participated, as well as a representation of the children. In the past, the cooperation took place at an ad hoc basis. The new plan makes many of the things we do explicit and puts a strategy in place. The plan consists of a general objective, specific objectives, activities that we will realize to meet those objectives, a budget and a time line. The whole document is about 50 pages and can be requested at info@morningtears.com.

The general objective of the cooperation with Morning Tears is to ensure that children whose parents are imprisoned or executed in Shaanxi grow up in a healthy and supportive environment and to make society aware about the problems that these children face. In the future we will concentrate on 8 specific objectives:

1. To raise awareness of the situation of the children and the care they need
2. To provide a safe and suitable environment for the children
3. To ensure that basic needs of the children are taken care of
4. To provide psychological support for children to overcome their trauma(s)
5. To prepare the children for and assist them with their integration in society and their development of life skills
6. To provide education to become responsible citizens
7. To build up care management capacity in Children Village
8. To enhance chances for successful family reunification

In the next newsletter you will receive more detail on these objectives.

Spring was not too bad



In March the local hospital offered two solar panels. They will be used to heat the water of the showers. Moreover the children will have their yearly check-up at the hospital.

From now on the children will be able to watch a multitude of channels on television. The local police donate a satellite antenna to Children Village.



Upcoming events

- Children Village is planning to build a wall surrounding the village to ensure a safer condition for the children. We are still looking for finances.
- Children Village will be publishing a story book written by the children themselves. At present the children are writing their unique stories in their spare time.
- A video about the life in Children Village is finished and is available upon a simple request at info@morningtears.com.

Feedback

This is the second issue of our quarterly newsletter. Your feedback will help us to improve. Also, we will be happy to include your contributions or announcements. We look forward to hearing from you. Please mail to: info@morningtears.com

The Story of Zhang Han and Zhang Rui

Zhang Han is 15 years old. She was only 7 when she was sent to Children Village. Teachers remember well the summer that Zhang Han arrived at Children Village with her younger sister of 5. Their eyes spoke fear and panic. It was the 31st of August 1998, and the two girls realized that, from that day on they would not be going back home.

Zhang Han had a hard time when she had just arrived in Children Village. 'Why did our parents leave us behind? What's wrong with us?' were the questions she kept asking not only herself but also everybody around her. Everyday you could find the girl squatting on the ridge of the fields, covered in tears, looking into the distance. Her younger sister, on the contrary, didn't say much. She went to school, did her homework, helped cleaning, and even helped the teachers in taking care of the younger kids, but nobody knew what was exactly was going on in her mind.

Two years went by and the two sisters seemed to get used to the life in Children Village. However, during the summer camp, I found Zhang Han sitting for hours on a rock, watching the lake. One afternoon, when she was sitting there again, I sat down next to her and watched the lake with her quietly. Suddenly Zhang Han asked me: 'Why? Why did first our father leave us? And why did our mother not want us any longer? Did we do anything wrong?' She gazed at me, her eyes full of tears. I suddenly realized that even though two years had passed, the pain and doubt were still there as strong as they had been before. I was speechless. Their father had left them because he got punished for his own doing; her mother had left them because she could not deal any longer with all the pressure. But how could I explain to a 9 years old child that the adult's world is imperfect, that adults make mistakes, and that she or her sister had not done anything wrong. I held Zhang Han in my arms... Suddenly, a firm young voice appeared from behind my back saying: 'Things happened as they happened. Will crying make any difference?!' I turned around and saw Zhang Han's younger sister, Zhang Rui. The girl of 7 was staring at us with a cold and serious look in her eyes. These were adult's eyes, speaking lots of experience.

Back in Children Village, life just went on like before, but the two sisters started taking in a special place in my heart. During the following 5 years, I was afraid that I would not be able to answer their questions and that I would only make them more disappointed. I started avoiding them but this made me only suffer...

Just before the Spring Festival of 2005, I brought some gifts to Children Village. It was less noisy as usual as about half of the children had been picked up to spend the Spring Festival with their family. The weather was bad and I played with the children for half a day. It was getting dark and I prepared to go to home. When I put on my jacket, I saw Zhang Han standing in front of the library looking at me... I suddenly realized... It has been 7 years and nobody has ever taken them home to celebrate the Spring Festival in an ordinary and real family. At that moment, I made a decision: I would take them back to my home. Maybe I cannot do much for them, and maybe I cannot answer their questions, but who's perfect, or painless? Maybe this is just what life is all about! And what I can do is to help them understand that, apart from the pain and imperfection in life, there is still something else, something that learns us what happiness is, or love, something that gives us the courage to live.

The three of us went home together, slept in the warm sun, went to the supermarket and enjoyed the happiness of being with the purchasing people together. We watched a series with our socks in the couch together hand in hand, we ran through the fields and screamed to the sky, we ordered anything we like in a small restaurant, and we told each other our own stories at candle light. Suddenly...we all cried... so this way happiness can be found.



Relevant actuality in China

China is not ready to abolish the death penalty

Beijing. China is not yet ready to eliminate the death penalty from its criminal code, according to Liu Renwen, professor at the Legal Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. "The government and the public opinion are not prepared" to take this step, he said. The biggest obstacles are the Chinese tradition, the use of death punishment to set an example for the population and the lack of public confidence in the judicial system. "If we can guarantee an impartial and fair judicial process, and ensure that the criminals won't get out of jail, people would be satisfied", he claimed. Corruption in the judicial system is a major problem, he added.

Liu thinks that the Chinese government itself would not be able to eliminate the death penalty even if it wanted to, due to the general public opinion in favour. "Some judges of the Supreme Court oppose the death penalty but they can do nothing", he explained. However, the publication last year of several cases of people executed who turned out to be innocent suggests a small change in the attitude towards this issue. The press is starting to cast doubt over the need for such hard punishment, specially when many criminals are condemned only on the basis of confessions obtained through torture. It would take "a political decision" by Beijing and a shift in people's mind, he said. Unfortunately, it won't happen in the coming years, he added.

About 8.000 people are executed every year in China, mostly by a gunshot, although in the cities it is more and more common the use of lethal injection. However, the number of executees has reduced steadily over the years. The introduction of the new criminal code in 1997 brought the reduction by half of the number of executed, as common robbery was no longer punished with death. However, there are still 68 crimes that can carry the maximum penalty, including blood crimes, but also economic crimes, the theft of cultural heritage or bank fraud.

Source: Spanish news agency EFE in Beijing.

Growing numbers of street children in China

Beijing. China has almost 600.000 orphan children, and the problem of street children is increasing in major cities across the country. Of the 573.000 Chinese orphans, only 11,6 per cent live in official orphanages. "We are seeing more and more problems of orphan children, given the insufficient basic services and lack of a complete network of orphanages", acknowledged Li Liguo, minister of Civil Affairs.

80 per cent of the orphans are adopted by other family members, even though most of their grandparents live under the poverty line. The miserable family situation pushes many of these children to run away and become street children, he said. On the streets, the kids face violence and are vulnerable to diseases such as Aids. Often, they fall victim to begging rings that force them to ask for money in exchange for a roof to sleep under and the protection of the organisation.

Additionally, there are up to 100.000 other children without parents but unregistered. The lack of papers to justify their identity makes them a "hidden problem" in the system.

Source: Xinhua news agency

Half of victims of women murderers in China are their husbands

Beijing. Half of all victims murdered by Chinese women are their husbands, boyfriends or neighbours, all male. Family violence, mistreatment and abuse are the main reasons behind these crimes, according to Zhou Jun, a Beijing judge. He recalls the case of a woman who "killed her husband when she lost control, after years of abuse". Zhou called for more understanding of the women situation. "We must create adequate channels to protect these women against family violence or unfair treatment. Most of them do not commit their crimes on purpose. Their experiences need our solidarity", he said. He also warned that the number of violent crimes committed by women is on the rise.

According to statistics of the All China Women Federation, at least one third of the 270 million of married Chinese women are beaten by their husbands. This is also the reason behind 100.000 divorces a year in China.

Source: Xinhua news agency

China considers banning selective abortion of baby girls

Beijing. The National People's Congress (NPC) is considering to increase up to three years the prison term for anyone who contributes or offers services of selective abortion of baby girls. Any one who lends the medical equipment or participates in the abortion could be condemned. "The artificial gender selection is dangerous for the social structure of China and may contribute to social instability", said An Jian, vice director of the Legislative Commission of the NPC.

Selective abortion of baby girls has caused a large gender imbalance in China, with 119 boys per 100 girls born, due to the one child policy and the traditional preference for boys by Chinese families.

Source: Xinhua news agency



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Morning Tears rebuilds the world for children who have lost their own world.

Morning Tears rebuilds the world for children who have suffered or are suffering heavy emotional pain.

We focus particularly on:

- Children whose parents are in prison;
- Children whose parents have been sentenced to death;
- Children who have been abused or neglected;
- Orphans;
- Children who haven't been registered at birth, and thus have no rights;
- Street children.

Morning Tears has been operating since 1999 on an informal basis without legal structure. However, in March 2005 Morning Tears became a formal non-profit organization registered under Belgian Law. Currently, Morning Tears has offices in Belgium and China.

Morning Tears is run entirely by volunteers. These volunteers are mostly professionals from the social sector or development aid workers, although we also have journalists and engineers in our group.

The running costs of Morning Tears are kept very low, so that donations can go almost entirely to the children in need.



Financial Barometer

We have good and bad news. The bad news is that at present we only have enough money for our daily running costs up to September 2006. We also need to deal urgently with the problem of the water quality.

The good news is that there might be some money on the way. We are in high hopes that the Province of Antwerp (Belgium) will provide us with allowances for the basic running costs for the remaining months of 2006. We are also hoping that the Province of Limburg (Belgium) will approve our request for financing a wall around Children Village. This wall would contribute a great deal to the protection of the children. On top of this we are organizing a barbecue in the Embassy of Belgium in Beijing on June the 10th. About 300 people are expected. This should also result in some further funding.

We are still looking for people willing to sponsor a child. Please let us know if you want to be involved! Write to us at info@morningtears.com.

Problems with the water quality in Children Village

Our fears have been confirmed! Laboratory results show that the water we use in Children Village is contaminated with E Coli. This can cause severe diarrhea. We are currently searching for a private company that is willing to donate a water-cleaning installation. Let us know if you have any ideas!

The full report on water quality can be requested at info@morningtears.com.