Rwanda: Govt On Course to Meet Deadline of Closing Orphanages

BY GRACE MUGOYA, 7 OCTOBER 2012

2014 is the time line set to re-unite orphaned children with their families. Already in a period of seven months, two orphanages have been phased out. Officials from the National Commission for Children (NCC) say that in less than two months, two more of the 34 targeted orphanages will have been closed.

Due to the challenges of identifying families of the orphans, the process tends to be slow, but Zaina Nyiramatama, the Executive Secretary of the commission, is confident that the target will be met in the given time frame.

"Within the first year, we have clearly identified the way forward. We shall recruit more professionals to help in the exercise," Nyiramatama told The Sunday Times.

She explained that structures have been established at the district level to engage district authorities to carry out the required activities.

The process, she said, involves assessing the situation of the families and empowering them as well as identifying other Rwandans willing to help or take the children to foster families.

"As we make efforts to close or transform orphanages into community centers to continue supporting the communities, we also have the responsibility of ensuring there are no new cases of abandoned children," she said.

She said that over Rwf 822 million was dispatched to districts to finance activities of 2012-2013. They include creating reporting systems that also involve the use of guardian angels also known as "Malaika Murinzi".

These are people or families that have willingly or voluntarily taken over the responsibility to take care of children from orphanages.

Officials say that after the establishment of all the structures with professional people, the exercise will move on faster compared to how it has been. The move to close orphanages is in line with promoting families as the core unit of society and responsible parenting.

This has also seen the introduction of the "Family Campaign" that educates and sensitizes the public about the need to take care of their children or families.

Being implemented in partnership with the gender ministry and Hope and Homes for Children (HHC), last week the exercise reached Noel Orphanage Centre in Nyundo, Rubavu District.

This is one of the biggest and oldest orphanages in the country and according to Nyiramatama.

HHC takes on the technical part that includes identifying families of the orphaned children; which according to the NGO, is the most challenging issue.

Officials from HHC recently said that according to their findings, some families believe that legal action might be taken against them for having abandoned their children.

However, NCC says no legal action will be taken urging families to willingly come out to take the children.

Reports from NCC indicate that according to a survey conducted early this year; findings indicated that children in orphanages at least have a living parent or relative.

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