

UN volunteers give part of their pay to orphans

SALIMA, Dec. 22 --- United Nations volunteers on Saturday donated over MK52,000.00 to Salima HIV/AIDS Support Organization (SASO) to organize a Christmas party for over 1,600 orphans.

“The volunteers raised this money (MK52,912.00) by contributing part of their monthly allowances for the needy children at SASO to participate in the festivities,” said United Nations Resident Co-ordinator, Zahra Nuru who handed over the cheque on behalf of 40 volunteers who contributed.

She said the donation was also made as part of celebrations marking the International Year of Volunteers 2001.

The year 2001 was proclaimed International year for Volunteers by the United Nations General Assembly to recognize and support the contributions volunteers make in promoting world peace, security and sustainable human development.

Other events the volunteers have undertaken in marking the year include painting of Area 18 Health Centre and SASO itself early this year, planting of trees along Lilongwe River and presentation of a MK51,000.00 donation to St. Thereza Children's Home in Lilongwe.

Founded in 1994 by the 2000 United Nations Poverty Award Winner Catherine Phiri, SASO which has its main offices at Old Salima Hospital covers a 100 kilometre radius --- some 379 villages with over 1,600 needy children, mostly orphaned by HIV/AIDS.

“You are doing remarkable work by looking after these children,” Nuru told SASO volunteers, adding, “AIDS is uniquely disruptive to economies because it is killing people in the prime of their lives”.

She said the loss of each breadwinner reduces children’s access to health care, education and nutrition -- leaving them in turn more vulnerable to infection.

SASO’s other activities include outreach programmes on HIV/AIDS, promoting and distributing condoms and mobilizing voluntary community support and home-based care for the sick. It also conducts pre and post-test counselling, promotes networking and information sharing.

“This is a timely donation because we had nothing for Christmas for the children. We will take all the 1,600 children together with their guardians to the lake. You will be surprised that although the Lake (Malawi) is 22 kilometres away, most of them have never seen it,” said SASO’s executive director Catherine Phiri.

“We will give them a very nutritious meal and all United Nations volunteers have promised to help us manage the event and look after the children. We will also be joined by the police and staff from Salima District Hospital,” said Phiri.

Apart from the donation, a United Nations Volunteer Kirsten Elisabeth Madsen is also working with SASO as the Community Outreach HIV/AIDS Adviser.

Madsen, a Danish national joined SASO in August. She has also worked with different HIV/AIDS programmes and community based organizations in Uganda and Tanzania before before.

Ends.