

Street side Story

Homelessness depicts the condition of people without a regular dwelling. The term homeless can include people who get night-time residence in some countries. In India and some other developing countries, the term is used to describe people who sleep in public places not designed for use as an accommodation for human beings. Instead of calling such pavement-dwellers as homeless or houseless, the new term being used is 'unsheltered people.' Call them street people or vagabonds or by any other name, there are people in the roads — men, women and children who are 'un-housed.'

Society in many countries has banished the unsheltered population to the sidewalks, parks, subways and in India we have seen them living inside huge concrete pipes that were meant for water movement! The Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, Government of India, reported that urban poverty in India is as high as 25 percent and over 80 million poor people live in cities.

Urban poverty poses the problems of housing and shelter, water, sanitation, health, education, social security and livelihoods along with special needs of vulnerable groups like women, children and aged people. It is pathetic to see the family mourning the dead on the platform, which is their home! The estimates of homeless people in India have been varying enormously and the survey result by a NGO put the figure at 78 million. They are on the streets, still live as a family!

India is the home to 63 percent of all slum dwellers in South Asia. The world population of street or community children stands at 150 million and is rising each year. Of these about 40 percent (65 million) are homeless and family-less whilst the balance works on the streets helping to

support their families. They do not attend school, are at risk from the street environment and have poor adult prospects, locked as they are into a cycle of poverty. Increasingly, these children are the defenseless victims of brutal violence, sexual exploitation, abject neglect, chemical addiction and human rights violations.

Rotary International President, Kalyan Banerjee's dream is to bring back the 'Low Cost Shelter Project' of The Rotary Foundation to mitigate the plight of the homeless. The Strategic Plan of RI includes focusing and increasing humanitarian service. As our RI President has laid emphasis on family as the basis for world peace, it becomes the prerogative of the Rotary clubs in India to undertake at least five low-

cost shelter projects during the year. Newspapers have reported that TATA Steel is now ready with a 'low cost shelter' that can be assembled in six weeks at a cost of Rs.32,000. The project can also be routed through The Rotary Foundation once the Trustees agree to implement the grant scheme later this year.

Most of us applauded the award winning film 'Slumdog Millionaire.' India has more than 11 million children living on the streets. A few may go to school. Some may be lucky to get some sort of job to support themselves. Others will invariably find themselves on the wrong side of the law. Rotary can give all of them a chance to live inside a small shelter they can call their home and wake up to a new day and new hope.



*Rtn. Ashok Mahajan
Trustee, The Rotary Foundation
Director, Rotary International 2007–2009
Member, International PolioPlus Committee*



Unsheltered people.