



## Media release

19 December 2019

*Save the Children welcomes UN General Assembly adopting Rights of the Child Resolution focused on children without parental care*

### **‘Governments now have an opportunity to stop supporting the unnecessary separation of children from parents’**

Governments all over the world now have a unique chance to end the support of orphanages and the unnecessary separation of children from their parents, and instead focus on helping families to care for their children, Save the Children said in a statement today.

The charity welcomed a ground-breaking decision by all 193 UN member states in New York today. By adopting a Rights of the Child resolution unanimously, they committed to gradually end support to orphanages and similar institutions, and instead focus on family and community-based care for children.

By adopting the resolution, the UN General Assembly also committed itself to improving data collection on children without parental care, and to tackle the drivers of the unnecessary separation of children, such as volunteering and financial support to orphanages. Tourist visits and volunteering in orphanages supports an industry that exploits children and makes them vulnerable to trafficking and abuse.

Save the Children NZ Chief Executive Heidi Coetzee said:

“New Zealanders are often attracted to tourism involving volunteering at orphanages. While they may have good intentions, an industry has formed to profit from these vulnerable children. In many cases the children are not orphans, they are taken from parents and used to solicit donations from well-meaning people. Travellers should avoid participating in these volun-tourism ventures.”

Rebecca Smith, Senior Child Protection Adviser at Save the Children, said:

“The majority of children in orphanages have at least one living parent. More needs to be done to support families to better care for their children, instead of sending them to an institution.”

“An orphanage is no place for children to grow up. Decades of research have shown that the institutionalisation of children is harmful to their physical, mental and social development. In addition, it disconnects them from their extended family, which in many countries is the only safety net they have.”

“While the majority of countries in the west have long moved away from this practice, many western people and organisations still support this harmful model in countries overseas.”

“This resolution is a historic chance for governments to really invest in child protection systems with well trained and screened social workers, who can support vulnerable children and families. To ensure real change, governments need to address the reasons children are often in care in the first place such as poverty, and having access to education and health services.”

Save the Children will support governments wherever possible to transition safely from orphanages to community-based care and to ensure that child’s perspectives, rights, and wellbeing are respected in this process.

## **ENDS**

### **Note to Editors:**

- An estimated 8 million vulnerable children worldwide live in poorly equipped orphanages and similar institutions which are harmful to their physical, social and intellectual development and expose them to a greater risk of violence, abuse, exploitation and trafficking.
- It is estimated that around 80 percent of these children have at least one parent, but they live in orphanage because the parent or direct family is too poor to provide for them.
- Save the Children started working on the issue of children without appropriate care after the Rwandan Genocide in 1994. Save the Children coordinated family tracing and reunification together with the Red Cross, which led to more than 56,000 children being reunited with their families over a six-year period.
- Save the Children is part of [ReThink Orphanages](#), a coalition of child protection agencies, travel and tourism organisations, faith organisations, and education specialists to raise awareness about the negative effects of volunteering in orphanages and instead support ethical alternatives.

For more information please contact: Ally Clelland, Communications Specialist, Save the Children NZ, phone 022 531 9514 or email [ally.clelland@scnz.org.nz](mailto:ally.clelland@scnz.org.nz)

### **About Save the Children**

Save the Children believes every child deserves a future. In New Zealand and around the world, we work every day to give children a healthy start in life, the opportunity to learn and protection from harm. When crisis strikes, and children are most vulnerable, we are always among the first to respond and the last to leave. We ensure children’s unique needs are met and their voices are heard. We deliver lasting results for millions of children, including those hardest to reach. We do whatever it takes for children – every day and in times of crisis – transforming their lives and the future we share.