

## **A Second Chance for Abandoned Babies in South Africa**

From VOA Learning English, welcome to As It Is!

Hello, I'm Steve Ember.

Today on our program: In South Africa, baby bins give abandoned children a second chance...Some Burmese Muslims may face birth limits to control population growth...and we go up, up, and away to mark a hot air balloon anniversary.

Every day, three babies, on average, are abandoned in Johannesburg, South Africa's largest city. They are dropped in waste collection boxes and left for dead -- often by mothers who lack money to raise them. A few years ago, a local group called "Door of Hope" opened what it calls a "baby bin". It is a place where mothers can leave their babies and know they will be taken care of. VOA reporter Emilie Iob recently visited the center. June Simms has her report.

To find the baby bin, you have to go a small street in Berea, one of the poorest neighborhoods in Johannesburg. There is a trap door in a wall, but could easily be mistaken for a mailbox. This is where mothers can safely leave their babies.

Francina Mphago works for Door of Hope. She says the bin has a small camera and a sensor. When a baby is placed inside, a bell rings in the

group's child care center, just a few meters behind the wall. Workers can see the box on a computer screen.

The baby bin opened in 1999. At the time, some mothers were abandoning their babies in waste cans, public parks and in the streets of Johannesburg. Often it was too late to save them.

Cheryl Allen directs Door of Hope.

"I thought about it and wondered if a woman wants to be anonymous, how can I help her? And so I thought that if I put a box in that wall, that they could put it in there instead of putting it in another rubbish bin."

Since it opened, the baby bin has received 148 babies. Some have since been placed with families locally or overseas.

Godwill and Nkhangwe Kekana have adopted and are caring for two sisters from Door Of Hope. They know the name of the birth mother. But they say something needs to be done about the emotional pain felt by abandoned children.

"I would prefer that when the child grows, he knows his or her roots. But like I said, sometimes you don't know what really pushes the parents at that time to take that action."

"I think the society must start teaching the children who are adopted, you know sometimes to not concentrate much on the roots. They might say 'ok I'm grown up, I'm 18 years old, I don't even know where I come from.' But they must appreciate that at least somebody took them in, and gave them life."

Baby bins exist in other parts of the world, but have often been surrounded by debate. Some critics say they have urged women to abandon their babies. Cheryl Allen disagrees.

"I think that it doesn't encourage abandonment because they are going to abandon it anyway."

Over the years, other groups have followed Door Of Hope and opened baby bins in other cities across South Africa. I'm June Simms.

You are listening to AS IT IS from VOA Learning English. I'm Steve Ember.

## ***Birth Limits on Burmese Muslims***

Burmese officials say they will examine a policy in effect in the western state of Rakhine. The policy sets birth limits on Muslims to control population growth. It limits Muslim Rohingyas to only two children.

Rights activists and Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi have condemned the measure.

The birth restriction on Muslims was first reported last week in Burmese media. Media reports also said the measure limits Muslims to one wife, when the religion permits up to four.

Officials in Rakhine state say the policy is being enforced in two areas on the border with Bangladesh. Rohingya Muslims are the majority population in both areas. The measure dates back to the former military rulers. But it has not always been enforced.

State spokesman Win Myaing said the new push on the limitations is part of efforts at family planning. He said that a presidential commission expressed support for the measure as a way to reduce tensions between Buddhists and Muslims.

Phil Robertson has served as Human Rights Watch deputy Asia director since 2000. He says Rakhine state border guards have sought stronger enforcement of the rules.

"I think what they're trying to do is control the terms of debate, that they are saying this is 'what we've done and it's justified by the national government of Burma.'"

The Rakhine Commission was asked to investigate the main causes of clashes between Buddhist and Muslims last year. That fighting left 200 dead and displaced 140,000 others, most of them Rohingyas.

The commission says a fast-growing Muslim population had raised fears among Rakhine Buddhists that they could soon become a minority in Burma. The group suggested helping Muslims to become more a part of society. And it advises family planning to limit the population growth. But, the commission says forcing any measures on the Muslims could cause more tensions.

Rights groups condemned the two-child policy as one of many continuing abuses against the Rohingya.

Human Rights Watch says anyone caught violating the two-child rule faces fines and jail time. It says some Rohingya women have ended their pregnancies to avoid punishment.

Opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi recently said the two-child limit is unfair and a violation of human rights.

## ***Up, Up, and Away – A Hot Air Balloon Anniversary***

Steve Ember here, with an eye to the sky.

This week marks the 230th anniversary of the day in 1783 when the first hot-air balloon took to the skies. French brothers Joseph and Jacques Montgolfier launched their invention, a big balloon about 10 meters wide, from Annonay, in southern France.

The unmanned balloon was carried by the wind and reached an estimated height of 1,600 meters in the sky. The balloon traveled up, up, and away for about 10 minutes.



*Hot air balloons soar over the Virginia countryside. Photo by Steve Ember*

Modern hot air balloons can soar over the countryside for hours, and are a popular – and romantic – form of sightseeing.

In the 1956 film version of French writer Jules Verne’s “Around the World in Eighty Days,” David Niven played 19<sup>th</sup> century Englishman Phileas Fogg, Verne’s time conscious traveler.

“It’s really very simple. We empty out some sand, and we go up. Then, we pull this, and, with any luck, we come down. I imagine we release some gas from the top of the balloon.”

One very memorable sequence was the hot air balloon flight from Paris to Spain.

And we’ll leave you with some of Victor Young’s lovely music for the film. A reminder – For the latest world news, join us for VOA News at the top of the hour Universal Time both on radio and on our website.

I’m Steve Ember. As always, thanks for joining us.