

MISSION NEWS



HANDMAIDS OF THE SACRED HEART

December 2024 - 2025

KEEPING UP HOPE



*Sr Rocio describes the situation of extreme violence and fear in the south of **Ecuador**. The Sisters are trying to maintain **active the hope** of these poor people.*

EXTREME POVERTY

“**El Guasmo** is a district of **Guayaquil**, situated in the south of **Ecuador**. It is estimated that in this heavily populated region live 600 000 people; the majority are migrants from the countryside who come searching for a better life and others who are looking for work. The poorest of the population live on the river banks or near the sea in extreme poverty. Their living conditions lack all the basic necessities of life. In this district, at the end of the road adjacent to the estuary, live the Handmaids of the Sacred Heart. Here we



are trying to care for the most vulnerable of the population, the girls, boys and adolescents. We are trying to prevent absenteeism from school, fight hunger... In this situation, **delinquency** and the **narcotraffic** are rampant and so is the violence caused by the buying and selling of drugs, with the **gunman** around... **All this has turned the district into the most violent zone of Guayaquil.**



HIDDEN SUFFERING

How difficult it is to describe so much poverty among these poor people, **their needs are camouflaged in the faces of the children** knocked about by so much violence, **their insecurity, the lack of resources of such a large, marginalised population.** What is evident is the **vulnerability of the girls and boys who have completely given**

up school and are hungry!...



FROM BAD TO WORSE

The long pandemic made the situation worse in El Guasmo and Guayaquil. Many mothers and the young people lost their jobs. Many criminal bands appeared, operating in the world of narcotraffic. They have succeeded in **involving the heads of the families by promising them "quick" and "easy" money.** In their **fight for power,**

violent deaths take place daily. The consumption of drugs is increasing. Young people are trapped and turn into **"zombis"** totally dependant on the powder, the buying and selling of the **"H"** as they call it.

Violence is even **more extreme...Organised delinquency has increased and so have extortion, open shameless robbery disguised in multiple forms...**There is no limit!

Many **businesses have closed down,** shaking the whole country!

Now a very important and fragile reality is affecting the educational centres as **they are being threatened and subjected to extortion.** Our children are receiving a poor and very limited education because of the conditions of fear and dread in which they live. Many educational centres have returned to **virtual education,** even though the **majority of the families have no internet in their homes and the adults cannot possibly help as they have not done any studies.**

"FUNCTIONAL ILLITERACY"

In our projects we have a large number of children who have been left without father or mother; others left without brothers or sisters, relatives, friends or neighbours.



They live all together victims of violence, the gunman and death. In our dealings with the people, we have noticed the increasing number of children who have become **functionally illiterate**. In the field of education, the gap with the poorest continues to increase.

WITH FAITH AND TENACITY

In the midst of this violent chaos and overcoming all fear, we the Handmaids, are facing the situation with faith and tenacity. Inserted in El Guasmo, we are doing **Apostolic Work of Insertion**. We have two projects of Social Promotion where we give preference to the life and care of girls, boys and adolescents in situations of vulnerability. In our **Centre of Desarrollo Infantil, "CARITAS ALEGRES"**, (Joyful Little Faces), we accompany girls and boys from the age of 1 to 3. At this moment we have 90 children who stay with us from 8.00am to 5.00pm. We also care for the families: the mothers, having to go out in search of work, have to leave their children alone.



We offer the children a happy atmosphere with joyful surroundings, safe for their integral learning. All the time we care for their health and daily nourishment to help their full development so important from the first stages of their lives. This year we felt very happy to see that many of our children had surpassed their malnutrition condition and reached the desired weight. They **had been rescued from being used as beggars on the streets**.



"PREPARING FOR LIFE"

Our second Project of Special Protection is **"RAICES**

NEGRAS" (Black Roots) where we accompany 150 boys and girls from 7 to 18 years of age. Occasionally we take some children who left **Caritas**

Alegres to continue the process started there; but generally we take children from surrounding districts,

who are in vulnerable circumstances. Our aim is to offer total attention and integral education to boys, girls and adolescents who live in poverty. We aim to save children from doing "child work". We take children who are at risk in their families or in their social surroundings. Each boy, girl and adolescent is accompanied in his or her integral formation to strengthen their personal qualities as members of a family and as citizens. We take care of their health and daily nutrition. We offer them also sports and games. We accompany their families in a monthly formation project, to empower them to prevent situations of risk for their families and to make the parents, especially the mothers, more aware of their responsibility towards their own children.

Our mediation with the State, is the possibility of obtaining the rights of citizens for the most vulnerable population in this corner of our country.



“ MAINTAINING HOPE”

We have often felt “proud” of many of our children, who, after overcoming their condition of malnutrition, have joined some centres of learning, thus being rescued from being used as beggars on the street.

We feel we are giving hope when a boy, having seen his name inscribed in the Civil Register and obtained an Identity Card, feels like a citizen with the right to have a name and a surname!

We are **encouraged in our hope** when our children are included in the State System of

Education, and the children say, **“Thank you”**.

“Brilliant! and “besides we have an ID card, as citizens”.

We **maintain hope** when we see that adolescents, feeling responsible, do not abandon their studies, thus gaining confidence to face their future.

We **feel hope** when a child, having been left an orphan through violence, comes to us and feels loved by each one of us in this Mission.

We **give hope** when boys, girls and adolescents come to the Centre, and feel **“at home”**, in our protected surroundings, accompanied by the Sisters.

So from this corner of our Mission we **MAINTAIN HOPE ACTIVE IN OTHERS AND IN OURSELVES”**.



EDUCATION: “ACT OF HOPE”



Sr Ana gives us an idea of the great need for education that exists in the Democratic Republic of Congo and describes what the Handmaids are doing to help in Kinshasa.

MANY CHILDREN OUT ON THE STREETS

“Our Mission in Congo DR started in the 90s. We soon realised that there were many children out of school wandering on the streets. We organised a **Drop-in Centre for the poor children** who came to us **in the morning**. In the afternoon **we had literacy courses for the women**.



BUILDING A SCHOOL

Things were going well and, thanks to generous donors, in the year 2000, we were able to start building a school in our district of Kinshasa. Having obtained the official permission, the school was opened in 2005 with the name **St Raphaela Maria's Infants and**

Primary School. We have more than 500 students. From the beginning, we have been giving preference to women in all our works. This is due to the fact that families still give preference to educating their sons, rather than their daughters. We have to bear in mind that in Congo DR, only 43% of the boys and girls, go to school. Consequently the level of illiteracy is very high and education is continually going down.



GREAT DEMAND

Our school is in very great demand, as we live in **Kinshasa which is overpopulated with more than 20 million inhabitants**. Our district never stops growing and many young families, displaced from East Congo, settle in this area. The class size in our school is very large, too large to be precise. **There are classes of 64-65 students**. That is why three years ago, we started looking for a **new classroom for the Primary School to be ready for the year 2024-2025**.

NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

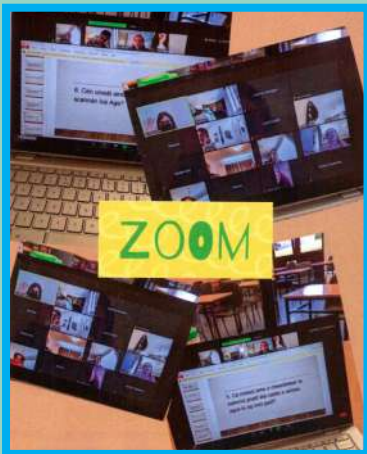
The need for education in this area is so great that we have decided to invest all our strength, physical, economic and congregational in this task. Bearing in mind that women are our priority here, we decided to encourage **non-formal education** which we can do in our Social Centre, St Raphaela Mary. **25 young girls are benefiting each year from our literacy and sewing courses**. It is **a great act of hope to see that these girls, starting from zero, are capable of learning how to sew and make patterns in 9 months**.



NEW TECHNOLOGY

Encouraged to go further in education, two years ago, we added **Information Technology** to the courses given in our Social Centre. This was possible thanks to the fact that **computers donated**





by Medicus Mundi of Cantabria, were sent to us by the Past Pupils of our school of Santander. We were able to “create” a room for the computers.

VERY SERIOUS DIFFICULTIES

As everywhere in the world, we too have grave problems: the global economic crisis, the birth-rate, extreme poverty, inequality in access to nutrition, the water problem, health, education, information, sexual abuse, the culture of internet... great challenges demanding answers!

THANKS

We want to thank all the good people who, even without knowing us, have helped us so much economically and many other ways, in the development of the school and the Mission”

“THANK YOU”

Sr Maria Chi, Regional Superior, wrote from **Viet Nam**, to thank us for a donation received in 2023:

*“Really I am lost for words. I am writing with tears in my eyes. Thank you very much. God is so good to us through your loving kindness. May the Lord hold you all in his Heart! May He repay you the way He knows best! **Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!**”.*

Sr Monica Yakamura, Superior of East Timor, thanks us for a donation sent in 2023:

*“Thank you for the donation you so kindly sent to our Mission in **East Timor**. We are most grateful for your understanding and also for giving us so much encouragement to continue with our Mission work, in East Timor. As you can imagine the work is not always easy, sometimes is very hard, but people and sisters like you, are really such an encouragement to us to continue. God bless you all”.*

*A very big **“THANK YOU”** was also sent from **INDONESIA**.*



*Wishing you all the Joys of Christmas
and a Happy, Blessed New Year*

many thanks

to all who have sent:

DONATIONS

POSTAGE STAMPS

Please continue to support our Missions

Send what you can to Sister Maria

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