

Annual Report 2020

Dear friends,

One day in 1985, ten small children were welcomed into our first home in Colombia. We could not have imagined then, that 18'000 children would follow in the various homes of the Fondation Aide aux Enfants, later to be joined by 5000 mothers and fathers enrolled in our professional training programmes.

After 35 years of presence in Colombia we have decided to fully transfer our activities to our Colombian partners. The Covid-19 pandemic having precipitated matters, this development also corresponds to a strategy of passing the baton which we had been considering for some years now.

Our mission was always guided by a series of basic principles: help without creating dependency, strengthen the family unit rather than perpetuating orphans and aim at a durable autonomy for our beneficiaries. We applied the same principles within the Foundation itself by gradually transferring the programmes and management of the homes to our Colombian partners. In fact, our initial mission is now almost totally handled in an effectively autonomous manner by the four local "Ayuda a la Infancia" Foundations in Bogota, Cali, Medellin and Darien. They are the owners of our homes in three of those cities and will soon build a new fourth home in Medellin, co-financed by Swiss and Colombian donations. These are solid bases to ensure the continuation of our work under local responsibility and ownership.

Colombia has also evolved over the past 35 years. There is now a clear desire to take over leadership of programmes aimed at helping the very young. A legal framework for the protection of the most vulnerable children has progressively been put in place with particular emphasis on minors. The new legal environment being quite constraining for the management of our homes, there was a risk of entering in competition with the social services offered by the Colombian state. We thus preferred to re-orient our activities so as to allow the Colombian social service administration assume its responsibilities under their own standards.

Even though a humanitarian mission is never fully accomplished, it was time for the above reasons to pass the torch to our Colombian partners. We have, therefore, taken the decision to put an end to the activities of the Fondation Aide aux Enfants. Within a few months, the totality of our assets and know-how will be transferred to our sister foundations in Colombia.

It is thus with mixed feelings of pride and sadness that I write you one last time as President of the Fondation Aide aux Enfants. If I had to use but one word to say on this solemn occasion, it would be "Thank you".

Thank you to all our local partners, our faithful staff, our local national director, our friends, the members of the boards in Colombia who put their heart and abilities at the service of those children and their mothers and fathers who needed it so much.

Thank you to all the members of my Foundation Board, to those of the Patrons' Committee and the Action and Organization Board, who gave freely of their time for the management and smooth functioning of the Foundation and the organization of events.

Thank you to our General Secretary Diane Granelli who for many years that she has brilliantly assured the smooth running of our Geneva office as well as the coordination efforts with Colombia. Thank you also to the team in charge of the critically important fund- raising efforts and project management, Catherine Lanvers and Emilie Romano.

Grateful thanks to Marc Groothaert, our Vice President who has been holding the fort in Switzerland as well as Colombia and is managing our transition calmly and professionally.

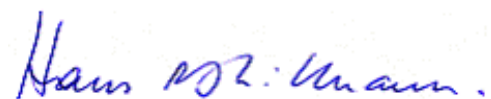
Thank you to my wife for her strong support and advice during this journey, and grateful thanks to my children.

Finally, I also wish to thank all of you, dear friends of the Fondation Aide aux Enfants. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for your trust and generosity without which this wonderful project would not have been possible.

Our close links with Colombia will endure and I express my very best wishes to our friends and partners in Colombia. Our mission is not altogether over in Switzerland. A group of people close to the Foundation intend to create a Friends of Bambi Association in order to perpetuate 35 years of solidarity in one way or another. I shall let them inform you about this project in the near future.

I could not close this farewell note without a thought for the children, the mothers and fathers and for all those who took care of them during these three decades.

In the words of Gabriel Garcia Màrquez: "Everyone wants to live on top of the mountain without suspecting that true happiness comes from how you climb the hill".



Hans Rudi Spillmann
President