

International Council of Multiple Birth Organizations **ICOMBO BACKGROUNDER**

While the newly updated **Declaration of Rights and Statement of Needs of Twins and Higher Order Multiples** seems fundamental to those involved with the world's multiple-birth community – the importance of promoting and supporting this document was recently highlighted by author Alessandra Piontelli in her book **Twins in the World**. In her travels throughout Africa, Asia, South America, and the Pacific rim, Piontelli observed how some cultures deify twins while other cultures attribute evil spirits to them and others outright destroy all multiple siblings. When asked to endorse the newly updated **Declaration of Rights and Statement of Needs of Twins and Higher Order Multiples** Ms. Piontelli offered these words and the following pictorial documentary as evidence of the importance of the focus of International Multiple Births Awareness Week.

“I hereby declare to be fully in agreement with the Declaration of Rights and Statement of Needs of Twins and Higher Order Multiples approved on June 5, 2010 and Adopted by the International Council of Multiple Birth Organizations (ICOMBO) and the International Society of Twin Studies (ISTS), May 1995 (updated 2007 and 2010).

I also find the initiative to celebrate an International Multiple Births Awareness Week - on behalf of the International Council of Multiple Birth Organizations (ICOMBO) - very laudable and necessary for spreading knowledge about the unique needs of twins, thus improving their condition.

The week will be celebrated for the first time ever this fall November 1-7, 2010 and I wish the organizers a great success.”

Alessandra Piontelli, M.D. University of Milano
Email: alessandra.piontelli@fastwebnet.it



Copyright Alessandra Piontelli

Brought up by the Elderly (Laos)

In this region twins are thought to affect negatively the fertility of the soil, and consequently of the crops. Further north they are killed. Here only all those past reproductive age are allowed to bring them up. These twins will never see their parents.



Copyright Alessandra Piontelli

Orphanage (Central-Southern Madagascar)

So-called ‘orphanages’ filled with twins abound in the region. Twins are almost invariably killed at birth for superstitious reasons. Some religious groups try to rescue them. Knowing the mothers go and deliver in special places considered to be free from evil spirits, they snatch the twins and put them in shelters. This is no guarantee of survival. As seen in the picture, the shelters are frequently filthy, unhealthy, and look like prisons. Besides often-severe physical problems, none of the twins in this orphanage could walk or talk.

Fate (The Philippines)

In this remote, mountainous region twins were usually disposed of. However even living few kilometres apart made all the difference. This village offered slightly better living conditions. These twins were spared.



Copyright Alessandra Piontelli



Copyright Alessandra Piontelli

Abuse and Neglect (Northern Paraguay)

The mother of these twins abandoned them at birth. Their grandmother rescued them unwillingly. Being married to the chief of the a community of Indios, she was blackmailed, and tormented by the corrupt police. Though the twins were not killed, their condition was one of extreme neglect. Abuse was also present: both twins had several burns on their skinny bodies as well as numerous bone fractures.



Copyright Alessandra Piontelli

Marginalized (Guinea Bissau)

Twins are almost inevitably killed by the two main ethnic groups living near the capital. Superstitious reasons lay at the basis of this conduct. This woman rebelled. However she was heavily marginalized. Nobody spoke to her, she was obliged to go around bare breasted, had to scrape for a living, and was given no shelter. Some children can be seen laughing at her in the background.



Copyright Alessandra Piontelli

The Good and the Bad Use of Ultrasounds (Assam, India)

These two proud female twin doctors were the living proof that sex discrimination is punishable under the law and not practiced in hospitals. However portable ultrasounds were used to by-pass the law as indicated by the massive number of females missing 'to the call' (Amartya Sen, 1990). Twin females were almost inevitably doomed.



Copyright Alessandra Piontelli

Poverty (Northern Uganda)

A devastating war has been raging in the region for more than 24 years. These parents had to walk for 4 days and nights in order to carry their 5 months old twins suffering from malaria to the only 'hospital' in the region. The parents are wearing their 'best clothes', and the mother is transporting all their possessions in a bag on her head.



Copyright Alessandra Piontelli

Being Venerated Can Be a Burden (Northern Togo)

Twins are generally venerated in all west African countries where Voodoo is practiced. However being venerated can carry disadvantages. These twins will be obliged to move about at all times holding the same oblong object symbolizing their perennial, sacred union. Only when the twins will reach the age of 7, the object will be broken and the twins be allowed to move separately.



Copyright Alessandra Piontelli

An Unjust Reputation (Middle Sepik Region, Papua)

In several books the inhabitants of both sides of Papua are described with an aura of ferociousness. Twin infanticide is declared to live on only amongst the Papua. As this photo shows twins are very much loved by most. Possibly aided by a largely matrilineal structure of the society, besides their mothers, most fathers take tender care of them.