**Caring for children**

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani

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The loss of my beloved elder brother Dr Prem Kumar Vankwani is unbearable. Even after almost one year, not a single day has gone by when the Vankwani family has not missed him. After the death of my father Dr Sital Das, my brother played a pivotal role in our lives. He told us that eternal peace and satisfaction is interlinked with serving humanity.

We, the Vankwani family, have decided to start a grand welfare project called ‘Prem Nagar’ in memory of our brother, in our native hometown. Its doors will be opened to every human being, regardless of their socio-religious affiliations. We have set a target of acquiring at least 100 acres of land. If intentions are good, God creates ease for people. The belief was further strengthened when the Vankwani family succeeded in the purchase of 110-acre land within a year.

The family was quite inspired by the performance of SOS Village Jamshoro and learned that the basic concept behind the success of every SOS Children’s village is to provide alternative families to vulnerable children and homeless women. Children of different ages and backgrounds live together in a house with a full-time parent, usually a widow who acts as their mother. There are usually six to 15 houses in a typical SOS village. Also, the organisation runs a variety of programs and facilities to support these children in terms of education, healthcare and training.

We sincerely wanted to establish a state-of-the-art SOS village at Prem Nagar. Today, I am happy to announce that the first welfare project is being launched in collaboration with SOS Children’s Village. In this regard, President SOS Children’s Villages of Sindh Senator Javed Jabbar and former president Yaqoob Zamindar formally signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) this week. I am grateful to the entire team of SOS Village, who visited Prem Nagar and provided practical assistance in appreciation of our vision of humanitarian services.

Historically, the first SOS Children’s village, also known as Save Our Soul, was founded in 1949 by an Austrian philanthropist, Hermann Gmeiner, after World War II had left many children orphaned and vulnerable. Today, 73 years later, this organisation has expanded the scope of its philanthropic activities in 135 countries and territories. In Pakistan, the institution was founded by Mrs Suraya Anwar, a social worker from Lahore, in 1975. Today, there are around 17 branches of SOS Children’s Village across the country.

SOS Children’s Village Prem Nagar has initially set a target of sponsoring at least five hundred orphans. We are committed to providing world-class facilities here and ensuring that vulnerable children sheltered in the village end up becoming good and responsible citizens. It is hoped that women, who will play the role of mothers, would be empowered to achieve a noble aim in her life.

During our discussions with the SOS team, it was decided that SOS Village Prem Nagar would follow three international frameworks – the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) adopted in 1989, the UN Guidelines for Alternative Care of Children adopted in 2009, and the UN Sustainable Development Goal adopted in 2015 and valid until 2030 – as guidelines for our operations focusing mainly on vulnerable children and families.

Also, the Vankwani family has decided that in the next phase it will ensure the provision of more welfare facilities for the elderly, homeless and disabled citizens in Prem Nagar in collaboration with Darul Sukun, Lowertopa Boys Association and other such organisations. May the soul of our beloved brother rest in peace.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.

He tweets @RVankwani