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Good Cause: Spanish Charity Aids Russian Orphanages

By Nosheen Shakil

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A Moscow veteran, Paula Fernandez came to Moscow in 1998 and has worked since 2002 in the financial department of the European Union Delegation in Moscow. In her spare time, she works as the treasurer of the Asociacion Sirot, a charitable organization providing support to Spanish families wishing to adopt Russian orphans and striving to improve the living conditions of orphans in Russia.

The charity is always willing to accept donations — such as diapers and baby food — to distribute to orphans and is looking for a web designer who can help build them a web site.

Q: What is the first charity you gave money to?

A: I only got actively involved in charity when I arrived in 1998 in Moscow. I saw that there is a need bigger here than elsewhere. The first organization I helped, and continue helping, is the Spanish-Portuguese Chaplaincy in Moscow.

Q: Which charity is closest to your heart?

A: Asociacion Sirot. I am currently the treasurer. A very dear friend, Cristina Nicolas, founded the organization in 2004. Asociacion Sirot started by providing support to Spanish families who were going through an adoption procedure but not participating in the adoption process itself. We saw the need for assisting orphans in Russia. We have been active in the region of Ryazan, with the Spassk-Ryazansky orphanage until the regional government decided to close it down.

Now, we help a number of different orphanages including a baby home in Ryazan for children up to the ages of four.

Q: What is the biggest difference between charity-giving in your country and in Russia?

A: This is difficult to say as there are people in need in every country. Sometimes we fail to see the need of our next-door neighbor or our colleague who is closest.

Q: Does your company have a favorite charitable cause? How was it chosen?

A: Our delegation has been supporting Reto Nadezhda, among other charitable causes. It was originally a Spanish organization that provides support to drug addicts. In 2006, Asociacion Sirot needed someone fast and trustworthy to help us start the refurbishment of the Spassk-

Ryazansky orphanage. We have worked together since then.

Q: Do you give money to panhandlers you see on the street?

A: No. If they approach me directly I tell them that I will not give money but ask them whether they need food or a drink. Sometimes they are surprised, but most of the time they accept a warm drink from a kiosk. Once I gave someone the tomatoes I was carrying. I never give money.

Asociacion Sirot can be contacted at asociacionsirot@yahoo.com. Reto Nadezhda is online at www.reto.ru.

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