

ISS Statement on the tragic events at *Hogar Seguro* in Guatemala

In addition to expressing its deep sorrow, sympathy and solidarity in the wake of the tragic events that have affected children and families at the Hogar Seguro Virgen de la Asunción in Guatemala, ISS also wishes to reiterate its concerns at the situation of children living in institutions, in particular in residential care institutions (RCIs), that do not comply with minimum quality standards embedded in international standards, that are not adequately and periodically supervised, and which therefore may entail serious risks of violations of the rights of children placed therein.

Indeed, this type of situations reflect the high risks and serious consequences that placements in RCIs – in particular in large ones – may have on children. Indeed, not only do these RCIs often not provide the quality care that is required to fully protect the welfare of children, but the latter cannot – despite the best intentions – receive individual and personalised care.

Thus, the efforts of all actors involved must be threefold : (1) they must be directed primarily at preventing separation; (2) at developing other forms of alternative care, specifically family-based care; and (3) at improving the quality of care in existing residential facilities so that it complies with international standards. Furthermore, the process must ensure child participation, including through the existence of an effective complaint mechanism. The process of deinstitutionalisation should be aimed at reducing the number of children's homes and orphanages, whilst actively promoting family and community-based solutions and ensuring support to families (of origin, extended, foster or adoptive). The priority should not be the opening of new homes, in order to ensure that their operation is truly a measure of last resort and a temporary option, and there should be a clear mechanism of periodic review of the children's placements by the competent authorities.

In this regard, ISS remains committed to supporting States and other actors in achieving this complex process of deinstitutionalisation, and in ensuring full compliance with international principles and standards relating to the rights of children in alternative care. Let us continue to work together to ensure that similar tragic events are not repeated elsewhere, and that the rights of children placed in alternative care, or at risk of so being, are fully respected and protected.