

UK's Prince Harry visits Unification Church's Joshua House Children Centre

Gladys Accra
December 4, 2016

Daily **Mail**
.com

Prince Harry's visit to a Caribbean children's home founded by the religious sect known as the Moonies has been defended by Britain's High Commissioner to Guyana - who described the work of its manager as "amazing".

Harry spent an hour touring Joshua House Children Centre in the capital Georgetown, an institution run by Gladys Accra, who is a member of the Unification Church - known as the Moonies after its founder Sun Myung Moon.

Her work caring for abused, neglected or poverty-stricken youngsters was praised by Greg Quinn, Britain's High Commissioner to Guyana.



Prince Harry visits the Joshua House Children's Centre in Georgetown, Guyana

Mr. Quinn, who was present during the visit, said: "What is she doing? She's helping 50 kids who would otherwise not have a great standard of life - what she and her husband and her family have done is amazing.

"I find it hard to question what she's doing in any way because she's doing very good work."

He stressed that a number of organisations and bodies both local and international have supported the children's home and that even the crew from the Royal Navy patrol vessel HMS Mersey did renovation work at the centre earlier this year.

Harry's visit to the centre came at the end of his 15-day tour of the Caribbean, which has seen him take an HIV test with superstar Rihanna in Barbados to promote World Aids Day, release baby turtles into the sea in St Kitts and Nevis, and visit Guyana's stunning Kaieteur Falls.

The children's home is next door to the Unification Church of Guyana, and when the Prince arrived he walked past a quotation from the Reverend Moon painted on an adjoining wall.

Part of it read: "We are not living for our personal ideal but for the ideal of God."

The visit saw Harry interacting with some of the 50 children, aged seven to 17, who are referred to the centre by a child protection programme if they are at risk from issues including abuse, neglect or poverty.

He held a question and answer session with some of the teenagers, and when asked what it is like to be a prince, he replied: "Good and bad, there's lots of privileges of course you get from when you're born, but with privilege comes responsibility."

Asked what his middle names are, he said: "I was christened Henry but everyone calls me Harry and I have, let's see where it starts, Charles, Albert and David - I have three middle names."

After hearing the long names of some of the children, he joked: "Mine are really boring."

But the light-hearted nature of the visit is likely to be overshadowed by the origins of the children's centre, which was founded in 1977 by the sect famous for its mass wedding ceremonies.

Mrs. Accra, 63, began running the home on a voluntary basis in 1994 with her husband Clifford, who died last year.

They were married with 6,000 other couples in South Korea, where they were blessed by the Reverend Moon.

She said: "The church established the home, the community now funds the home. Every day people make donations to help with things like the breakfasts and the groceries, and bringing items and clothes, not the church, the support is from the community."

Speaking about her faith, she added: "The Reverend Moon was a great man who only worked for great peace - from 16 years old he got a calling from God to work."

Known as Auntie Gladys by the children, she went on to say: "He never talked about religion, he talked about being a good human being."

She stressed all religions and churches are welcome at the centre, and some outside churches provide support as well as the Guyanese government.

Her son Godis said some Unification Church members volunteer and the church provides "moral support" at the centre.

Kensington Palace declined to comment.

Later, Harry heard the harrowing stories of girls, some as young as nine, rescued from lives as sex slaves when he joined First Lady Sandra Granger at State House, the official residence of her husband, President David Granger.

Many were snatched from captivity by the Guyana Women Miners Organisation, a group set up to represent thousands of women working in the country's interior extracting gold, bauxite, titanium and other precious metals and minerals.

In remote mining areas women are often mistreated, some held as forced domestic servants but many, particularly indigenous people, trafficked as sex slaves.

The women's organisation has set up a safe house, with the Sisters of Mercy nuns, which is home to 29 young women and girls. Its trafficking unit often sends in snatch squads to rescue the victims.

Marina Charles, head of the unit, said: "If we tell the police and authorities about it in advance, they tip the men off and the women have gone by the time we get there. It is often dangerous work."

Harry met one nine-year-old girl who was raped repeatedly for two years from the age of seven by a man now aged 38.

The girl, who like all the victims cannot be identified, was rescued by her brother, who killed her paedophile abuser, strangling him during a struggle to free her. He has now been jailed for 15 years.

Harry, 32, also met a 12-year-old girl who has a six-month-old daughter fathered by her abuser.

"This is very sad. They are so young and little," Harry said. "She shouldn't be a mother yet. She's so young."

The group, whose cause has been championed by the First Lady, said the girl was by no means the only one so young to have a child as a result of abuse.

From there, Harry and his entourage headed to the airport, taking a charter plane to Barbados after a ceremonial farewell with a guard of honour.

The Prince and his entourage were due to pick up a scheduled service to London later.