

Thousands of orphans  
are forgotten because of  
the way they look.



We ask you to  
choose **with love**

There are at least 153 million orphans in the world. But selecting an orphan is often reduced to a browsing experience, leaving thousands of children unchosen because of the way they look, where they're from, their age, or other factors that should be irrelevant when helping a child in need. We say no more. Won't you join us?

**Reimagine Orphan Sponsorship with us.**

**Choose unconditionally.**

**Choose with love.**



# Are We the Victims of Our Own Prejudices?

Every single day, all over the world, children become orphaned. Islam places heavy emphasis on orphan care. The Quran mentions our duties toward orphans 23 times. This alone should suffice for us to act. "And they give food—in spite of their love for it—to the needy, the orphan and the captive."

**(Quran76:8)**

We are grateful to our donors and friends for fulfilling this duty and showing what it means to be exemplary human beings. There is an important issue that we must bring to your attention. We noticed that whenever an orphan profile of a cute little girl is uploaded to our website for sponsorship, she is often chosen by a sponsor the very same day or the next. But if the child's photo is not as cute, if the child is older, or if it is a boy, the orphan might wait a whole year for a sponsor.

We see the same prejudice applied to children based on what region or country they are from. We must refrain from such Islamically unacceptable behavior. If our motivation is kindness, and to please God Almighty, the Lord of the heavens and the earth, and to be closer to Prophet Muhammad (on him be peace) in the Hereafter, as he promised in his Hadith, then we should choose unconditionally and choose with love.

There is no difference in goodness between sponsoring a boy or a girl; between sponsoring an African, Indian, Middle Eastern child, or children from other parts of the world; between sponsoring a child one finds cuter than another. When looking purely through the lens of need, all orphans deserve equal support. If there is no difference, then we must look within and ask ourselves: Are we the victims of our own prejudices? Are we supporting children purely for God's sake, or for our egos?

We at Zakat Foundation believe every orphan deserves love and support. Your reward is the same, regardless of who you sponsor. God loves them all. We at Zakat Foundation have committed to stop using pictures for orphan selection — we're making a change. We choose to love unconditionally. No more browsing for children. We assure you that every orphan enrolled in our program goes through a thorough needs assessment. Rest assured that the orphans you sponsor will receive the help they need to thrive, and we pray you receive everlasting rewards here and hereafter.

After you submit your unconditional sponsorship, we will send you a photo and profile of your orphan so you can learn more about the child. For just \$50 a month, your orphan will get a good education, nourishing food, health care, new clothes, Eid gifts, and love. Please help us care for a needy orphan. Sponsor with dignity, without prejudice, without a picture, without checking age, race, or gender.

Together, let us honor the orphan. And may God honor you for it.

Your brother,

*Halil Demir*

Halil Demir  
Executive Director



# Why Choose **with love?**

An Interview with Zakat Foundation's  
Chief Marketing Officer, Amna Mirza

## Q&A with CMO **Amna Mirza**

Zakat Foundation of America's orphan sponsorship program has been growing continuously and consistently for years. Its success is based on a pure principle: Help children who lost a parent or both of their parents. It was never just about financial support, though. It was about making sure these children had access to education, health care, new clothes, Eid celebrations, love, hope and prospects for a bright future. The program was doing well. But it could do better.



Chief Marketing Officer Amna Mirza said she realized soon after joining the organization that although the program provided strong support, the user experience for donors felt reduced to a superficial process. It just didn't feel right to her to pick an orphan from an assortment of photos. She explains her thought process in a brief Q&A.

### **Q: What led you to change the orphan sponsorship approach on your website?**

**A:** Most of the children looked sad, oftentimes, the children didn't look like they wanted their photos taken. A lineup of low-quality photos of vulnerable children made me sad. There was no consistent look or feel, and the photos looked staged. From a marketing view, we had a lot to improve. The sponsorship experience made me feel like I was shopping. I found myself scrolling through pages and pages to find that one child who "looked right," whatever that means. Within days of joining the organization, I realized we had to change our approach to orphan sponsorship.

I conducted a survey of how orphan sponsorship is managed around the world. Pretty much every organization had this photo-based approach, Muslim and non-Muslim; whether the sponsor was choosing a child or the child choosing a sponsor, photos were at the center of the experience. The biggest issue to me was the shopping experience.

### **Q: How did you arrive at your current solution?**

**A:** I prepared a pitch six months into my job to shift our approach, and I presented it to our ED and our director of development. It was a really important conversation we had to have. Morally, we all agreed with changing our approach. It would be a risky move for us to remove photos because we know our sponsors are used to that process and often want to see the photos beforehand. Many probably aren't aware they hold an unconscious bias. Our Executive Director was strong in his conviction and supported it. He said let's do it, and let's do it right.

It's taken so long because our world is in a constant state of chaos, with one emergency campaign after the next. Reimagining our orphan sponsorship program has been a monkey on my back. I couldn't shake it; I needed to get it done. We had to get the timing right, and as



CMO, I had to make sure the front-end web experience was beautiful, and that we made it a simple experience for our donors to sponsor children. We spent months working on a new database and reworked agreements with our orphan sponsorship partners across the globe. We put in new processes for our partners and field officers to interview and screen orphans. Now, we're ready for a full, cohesive, morally sound and best-in-class user experience.

**Q: How will donors know who they are sponsoring?**

**A:** I understand donors want to sponsor children who are from their homeland, who look like their children, or who they can see themselves in. We want them to be confident that children in each of the 15 countries we provide services to need their love and support. For many, their sponsorship saves their life. We know our donors care more about that than the color of the child's skin or their age

As soon as a donor takes the leap of faith to sponsor an orphan through Zakat Foundation of America, they get an orphan profile within a week to get to know the orphan they sponsored. They receive annual updates and can request more frequent updates as well, allowing them to develop a strong connection.

We have an option that allows donors to select "where most needed" in their sponsorship; this option auto-selects a child in dire need of support. My hope is that our donors will always choose this option, helping make the greatest impact where most needed.

**Q: What impact do you hope to make through this change?**

**A:** We live in a world where it's very easy to "other" the people around us. It's getting more difficult to see ourselves in other people. We've lost our human connection to one another. When we're talking about the humanitarian world, there is no room for that. We can't let how people look on the surface prevent us from helping.

Our data showed us that younger, fairer-skinned girls were more likely to be sponsored than darker-skinned teenage boys. My hope is that after this program has been implemented for a year, we will see that number change to be more equitable to the orphans and vulnerable children we sponsor. With an estimated 153 million orphans worldwide, the need is easy to see: they all need our help. Last year alone, Zakat Foundation of America cared for over 630,000 vulnerable children. Together, we can care for more. We simply must.

I'm a mother with two young girls. When I see the pressure on looks and this superficial "swipe right, swipe left" culture becoming normalized, I realize more and more that I want my children to focus on loving and helping everyone, not just people who look like them. Our humanity – our human connections – must prevail; otherwise, why are we here?



# We say **no more** browsing for orphans.

We say no more choosing **orphans from pictures**



We say no more choosing **the cutest orphan**

We say no more choosing **the youngest orphan**



We understand that many people might like to see orphan photos, but we invite you to help us guard our orphans' dignity and encourage equal support for all children.

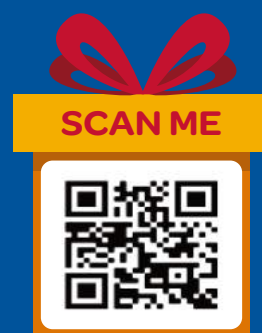
After submitting your sponsorship unconditionally with love, Zakat Foundation promises to send you a profile and photo of your orphan within seven business days.

Your sponsorship provides food, education, hygiene, and other urgent aid to the sponsored child. Most of all, it provides hope and a promising future.

**Choose Orphans  
Unconditionally.  
Choose **with love.****

Only \$50 a month  
can save a child's life

**[zakat.org/sponsor](https://zakat.org/sponsor)**





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