

How Many More Dead Children for Corporate Profit?

by Donna Smith via reed - CommonDreams *Monday, Aug 15 2011, 11:02pm*

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Below is a photo of a dead child from Pakistan, Syed Wali Shah, 7, that Michael Moore's site featured when showing the continued prospects of civilian deaths attributable to U.S. drone strikes. Syed is one of 168 children killed in seven years of CIA drone strikes, said the [report](#) cited, and in response to the findings, Unicef, the United Nations children's agency, said: "Even one child death from drone missiles or suicide bombings is one child death too many." The same report said a minimum of 385 civilians (including the children) were killed over that seven-year period and that makes at least 52 civilians killed by these strikes each year or one each week.



It is a horrific reality that we (and many of our allies in the civilized and militarized world) participate in killing children [with impunity]. It is right that we must look at their faces and hold our own souls and that of our elected officials and those who order the killings to account.

When I read about another child's preventable death in Colorado and saw his face (also from a [linked article](#) on Michael Moore's site), I waited a couple days to compose my thoughts rather than diminish either death or the numbers of deaths from decisions and actions by adults in power - whether those deaths are by acts of commission or omission or whether those deaths are in a distant foreign warzone or one in Denver or Dallas or Des Moines.

The other child pictured is Zumante Lucero, 9, from Denver, Colorado, in the United States of America. We don't like to show our dead children when they are, well, actually dead as in the photo of little Syed from Pakistan. We're too civilized for that (or at least we try to present to the world that we are). But rest assured, Zumante is now just as dead as Syed. Unicef made no comment on Zumante's death.

Zumante died from preventable complications of his asthma, and he is one of the at least 123 Americans who die [preventable deaths](#) every day because they could not afford or access the care that might have saved their lives. That means 861 dead each week, about 44,772 each year, or about 313,404 over seven years - dead Americans of all ages due to lack of access to care or coverage that might have afforded them care. In Zumante's case it was both - lack of care and lack of coverage, and both causes were eminently preventable.

I wonder how many of the people involved in the lack of action in Zumante's death know what it feels like to gasp for air during an asthma attack as this young boy did leading up to his death - or how many who are asthmatics know the tremendous relief of getting the right medications, including the miracle that can be the long-term relief meds like that denied Zumante can give.

During an asthma attack, it can feel like someone is holding a pillow partially over your face. You can breathe a little, but not quite enough to get enough oxygen to feel comfortable, so you breathe a little faster and a little faster, and nothing quite helps. In a really severe attack, heart rate can increase dangerously, wheezing gets worse and not enough oxygen is available to keep other vital functions going – including the brain. It can be very scary indeed, even for an adult, in the moments before getting some relief to open up bronchial space enough to feel like the pillow has been removed. Rescue inhalers are short-term and will often help enough for the worst of an attack to abate; other inhalers with longer-acting anti-inflammatory properties can often make the acute moments less frequent and less severe. Zumonte went months without the longer-acting meds so when his final acute attack hit him, his little body just couldn't fight off the crushing suffocation that killed him.

Zumonte suffered a horrible death. Nine-year-old Zumonte was surely terrified and in great pain in his last conscious moments. And it was all very likely preventable.

I am an asthmatic. I used to live in Denver, and I took the medication Zumonte went without. That medication was a miracle for me that made acute asthma events almost non-existent. I still used my rescue inhalers but only once-in-a-while. But, the inhalers with the long-acting properties are very expensive. Even when I had fairly good health insurance, it was hard to afford the co-pays. I suppose that was meant to discourage policyholders from filling those prescriptions – but to take those drugs sporadically or less than directed is not effective in terms of symptom control, so unless one can afford them all the time, it is really nearly pointless.

But I am an adult who may be better able most of the time to signal to others when my asthma is reaching a tipping point, and I am an adult upon whom we rightfully bestow a higher level of responsibility for finding ways to overcome obstacles to care. I wish I could say I was always able to get my long-acting meds. I was not. Sometimes other life necessities seemed more pressing – like rent, or food or heat or gas for the car to get to work or meds for my husband's heart issues. In those moments, I would double up on the rescue meds for myself. If that didn't work, I would end up in the doctor's office begging for samples or in the emergency room struggling to breathe. These are the decisions people are making every day in our dysfunctional, profit-driven healthcare system.

Our nurses know that providing a progressively financed, single standard of high quality healthcare for all through a single-payer model would have saved an awful lot of suffering and death caused by America's healthcare-system. Zumonte could have had his meds months before the asthma attack that was his last. There would have been no glitch in approving or proving or verifying coverage – public or private. When everybody is in and nobody is out, all the little children are in no matter what the adults upon whom they depend may do or not do.

The nurses of National Nurses United include guaranteed healthcare for all as one of the main points of their Main Street Contract for America. The nurses support the The American Health Security Act of 2011 (HR1200/S915) because it would protect our children from preventable acts of commission and omission by adults inside and outside the healthcare system like the series of things that resulted in Zumonte's death at just nine years old. (check out the nurses' Main Street Contract for America: <http://www.nationalnursesunited.org/affiliates/entry/msc1>)

Rest in peace, both Syed and Zumonte. I grieve your loss from this world at the hands of those who profited and at the hands of those who should have acted to save you and did not do so. Surely people know that killing you kills a part of each of us – killing you diminishes what we hope to achieve in a more peaceful and just world. There is no redemption in any part of your deaths. May you find in your final rest the peace robbed from you in your brief moments on this earth. Your

stories and the photos of your beautiful faces may be part of what pushes more adults who do care to act. I pray that will be the case.

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