

To : Sister Superior of St. Catherines Home

Subject: Request for cooperation on roots searches

21 April 2014

Dear Sister Sagaya,

We would appreciate if you could take the time to read this letter, as it will explain to you why many of us adoptees are coming to you with questions. We also try to elaborate on possible solutions, as from the experience of other organizations who are confronted with similar questions.

As you are aware, the UN Convention on the rights of the child, states that:

*“The child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality and, as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents.”*

Rights are not written down lightly. It is because it is acknowledged that **it so important for a person to have an identity, a name, a nationality**. Adoption takes away that right, the right to the name that your mother (parents) gave you at birth, and in case of international adoption, also your nationality is taken away. I do realize that everything is done with good intentions. Only, it's time to realize, that although intentions might have been good, there are sometimes severe consequences for the adoptees.

**Many of us are happy with the lives that we have**, grateful for the chances we were given. **Still, a piece of a puzzle is missing** in our lives and you -as owner of information- are the only ones who can give us this missing link. A part of us are not doing great. Some don't find a real home, don't connect, keep on feeling as an outsider, stay troubled,.. This is also a reality of adoption that some people choose to ignore.

We understand that it must be hard to be in the middle, the party between the mother and the child, with obligations to both. We also understand the difficult circumstances in Indian society, where mothers can be put at risk if ever is known that they gave birth to a child outside marriage or in other circumstances (rape, child abuse, pregnancy with somebody of another caste,...). Let it be clear, **none of us wants our mothers to be put at risk**.

We are aware of the existence of organizations in Mumbai, working under the same social circumstances, which do try to interact as in interface between the mothers and the children.

In their methodology:

**Mothers are given the choice** when giving up their child for adoption: if they want to be found later on, they can **leave their contacts**.

➤ *St. Catherine's Home does not provide this option.*

**Mothers are given the possibility to leave a letter, a gift, or any other personal artifact behind in the agency/home.** When the child comes back at later age, they can read why they have been given up, they can look at a picture from their mother or both parents...

➤ *St. Catherine's Home does not provide this option.*

**Mothers and children can go back to the organization, where they get support in their needs.**

- if children come with questions about their roots, the organization will try to contact the mothers to explore the possibilities of establishing a means of contact.
- if mothers come with questions about their children, the organization can inform them about how the children are doing, if the children made previous enquiries, etc.

➤ *St. Catherine's Home does not provide this option.*

Those organizations have decided to apply the CARA guidelines and work on a right-of-the-child basis. They wait until the child contacts them before trying to contact the mothers to really establish a contact between mother and child.

The means of approach vary, but a method with a relative high success rate exist in visiting the mothers with the excuse of a social investigation they conduct about the mothers' friend. Not only does this practice wave any suspicion, it also isolates the mother from her surroundings to reveal the true reason of the visit: discussing if she would consider contacting her child.

**This is possible for the other organizations, why not for St. Catherine's Home?**

Such organizations have built up an expertise in this over the years and are willing to share their knowledge with others. They work in the same areas as you do. St. Catherine's was in the past invited to contact them to exchange experiences. It appears that no such effort was thus far taken by you. **Why not ?**

Compared to the above mentioned organizations, St Catherine's approach is limited to explaining us the social circumstances in India, that our mothers loved us, that we should be grateful, that we should be happy, that they are all children of God. We can assure you that most of us are not satisfied with that answer on long term.

Each and every one of us visits St. Catherine's home with the best intentions and high expectations hoping to find the missing piece of the puzzle that is our life. We walk through your gate overloaded with emotions and blissful of the fact that we do have a "home" to come to in India.

You as representatives of God and responsible of us, adopted children, are sending us back to our countries with a very generic story, and worse, sometimes even lies

**According to the CARA guidelines, you are entitled to disclose at least the circumstances of our adoption.** Also according to these guidelines, you as an adoption organization can disclose information about the mothers with their prior approval. You fail, to date, to inform the birth mothers about their right to decide to disclose identifiable data. **Why ?**

St. Catherine's Home should look up the files and provide correct information whenever requested. You fail to do so. **Why ?**

Many of us believe that conversation is the right way and for that reason approached St. Catherine's directly but none had the wanted result.

Some of us have chosen to work with Arun and Anjali of ACT. Their actions seem to be only ones that lead to successful root searches. This going from recovery of information to reunions with their birth mothers and/or families. Those examples prove that it is possible.

Nowadays information is shared on social media, creating a public awareness about the fact that mothers are wondering what has happened to their children, mothers are willing to meet them and reaching out to the internet to find them.

Of course there are other stories as well. At least we need to try to complete our life's story. Now, for many, everything stays a big question mark and it's not something that you can just put easily behind you.

We have learned that it is not uncommon that St. Catherine's Home swaps administrative files of children when sending them for adoption. You say you do this in the best interest of the child. **This makes that you have an even bigger responsibility on the administration of personal data of the children and makes you the only source we can turn to to obtain correct information about us.**

Most of us would rather invest in a decent support of our roots search than to pay a lawyer to have access to High Court files that might in some cases are not even ours, to pay services as ACT that work in an aggressive way towards the adoption organizations, but apparently are successful.

Unfortunately, your lack of support in our roots searches leaves us no alternative but reverting to the before mentioned methods. **We ask you urgently to reconsider your methodology.**

You mentioned that many (Belgian) adoptees come with the same persistence and same questions. This must show you how important it is for you to share the true information, the real files that you have, with us.

Our requests:

- Please invest in the part of the adoptees.
  - Please stop giving us false information. It is about who we are, we feel it something is not right, so we come back with more questions.
  - **Please acknowledge our right to know at least the true circumstances of our adoption.**
  - You can chose to work closely with the local adoption organization in our countries for emotional support in case we need it.
- Please invest in the part of the birth mothers / families.
  - Giving the opportunity to contact the child, to leave a letter, a picture, at the time of surrender.
  - Make sure she is aware she is always welcome as you are to only link between her and her child (also for us adoptees it is important to know our mothers have a place to turn to).
  - Please inform the mothers on their right to decide to disclose identifiable data, being it at time of surrender but also years after, as motherhood is indefinite and social circumstances might change over the years.
- Please invest in being the go-between mother and child, to avoid that roots searches would harm the mothers. There are organizations with this expertise in Mumbai. Please contact them.

We are in the belief that this letter enables you to reconsider your ideas and methods about dealing with roots searches and hope for a fruitful future cooperation.

Adoptees “Roots Search India”