

A VOICE OF A DISOWNED CHILD

On 25th March 2008, it was around 1:30 p.m. that I was sitting in my office all alone engrossed in so many thoughts. A man in his mid 30's and an old woman probably in her 60's carrying a child on her back entered the room. I asked them, "How can I help you?" The man replied, "We heard that you (Miqlat ministry) take care of unwanted babies and people". I was taken aback and asked him from where he heard such a thing. I also asked him what he means by that and what is the purpose of his coming. Then he unfolded to me this heartbreaking yet heartless story.

The purpose of their coming was to dispatch the child who is just 30 months but is found out to be HIV positive. Both the child parent died of AIDS, and now the child lives yet disowned and despised. The man is his uncle and the woman his grandmother. They have come with all of the child's stuff fully packed with the intention to leave behind the child for good. They said the child has become a big burden for them, and they are also kind of outcast even from the community just because the child is positive. The man even said, "If it was an animal, we could have killed, cut and thrown it away. But since he is human, that cannot be done."

When I heard this, honestly my blood ran up to my head, and I just couldn't control myself. I screamed once and then tried to cool down to let them finish narrating the episode that they have begun. The baby was there crawling and playing on the floor. But I even lost the strength to look at him because I was almost broken inside. I just didn't know what to say or what to do. But I realized that I had to speak up for the sake of this innocent precious child.

I told them that what they are thinking and doing is not at all right because they are playing with a life that is a gift of God. I also tried to make them understand that just because a person is infected by HIV doesn't mean that he/she has to be treated or even looked differently. They are also normal people like you and me, and have every right to live a life that is dignified, hopeful and consistent. I thought I shared to them what I felt I needed to do at that moment. I don't know how much they have understood and realized, for they still refused to take the child back home. I was speechless again because I really didn't know where to put the child since we don't have shelter at Miqalt at this time.

Since it was Friday, I asked them to take the child at least for the weekend so that I can find out a way in the meantime. But they bluntly refused. I felt so helpless and broken, and I also felt so ashamed thinking how selfish and stupid we human

beings can be. A child who is just 30 months is supposed to be with the mother playing around her and maybe even breastfeeding. But why is this child denied of all these privileges? What is his fault? Just because he is HIV positive, does he deserve to be treated this way? It's just unbelievable how cruel we humans can become out of our ignorance and pride.

But God the creator and sustainer cares. He knows this child, and He already has a plan to help him out. The NEDHIV Centre in a Burma camp, where they keep and serve affected and infected people, willingly took the child. I don't know how long God destines this child to live on earth, but I know that the centre where he is staying now is the place God wants him to be. As I sent off the child, I was overwhelmed with mixed feelings: happy that he is no longer under the custody of the heartless people, but sad that he is disowned by his own family.

The interesting thing is the family that has disowned the child is connected with Miqlat since 2008, for we give a little bit of educational support to one of their children. In some ways, we wanted to stay connected with the family because of the child that they have disowned. It has been our prayer and hearts desire that one day they will come to their senses, and give back the child his right: the right to be called their son, their family member. Every time we meet, we ask about the child, and we encourage them to pay a visit to him. They always say "yes", and so we trusted them.

Maybe we were too naive. We thought that they visit the child and that at times take him home with them. But to our surprise, it was only on the 23rd June 2009 when I and my colleague went to visit the child and found out that the family have already written an agreement in the court since last December that they don't want the child anymore. The family never said anything to us.

We also realised that the family never visits the child except this one time to sign that agreement. We were speechless, and our heads bowed in shame and guilt. All this time, it's like the life of this child and our labor to help support the child has been taken for granted. The game has been beautifully played. But what do we say? We are all Christians, and it's the same Christian group involved in this matter. On one hand, it hurts so much, but on the other hand the fact that the child is doing so well, growing gracefully and looking gorgeous, gives us the joy to smile.

This is not to blame anyone but sharing the plight of this innocent child. He is alive yet without a home, without a family to call his own, without an identity, without a language and even without a surname. He was born possessing all these but denied just because he is infected with HIV. Isn't this heart-breaking? Whom do we blame?

I'm sure some weekends he'd love to go home and stay with his family, he'd love to spend holidays and Christmas with his family. But how and where? As I look into

his eyes yesterday, all these thoughts race into my mind, and I realise that God wants me to speak out for this child. So with so much pain and shame, I write this to all thinking citizens to uplift the cause of this child in our hearts, and respond to the need of this child as God speaks to you. I really want to acknowledge the NEDHIV Centre for taking up such a huge challenge and willing to identify with people such as this amazing child, giving them a home, taking care of all their basic needs, and willing to journey with them all through pain and sorrow. God bless you all abundantly!!!

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