

1. ‘Cherry’ (not her real name) in Lebanon

Cherry was trafficked to Lebanon in 2012 by a trafficker who had promised her a white collar job. Once in Lebanon, she was placed at an abusive household to work as a domestic staff. The work environment however turned out to be quite abusive – sexual assaults, working long hours, non-remittance of salary and physical assaults, among others. In a span of about 6 months, Cherry escaped for fear of aggravated abuses, or even death. She joined other Kenyan ladies who were already surviving on the streets of a city called Dekweneh where she eventually got married to an Egyptian man using Muslim rites in 2015. Cherry’s marriage gave forth two children, Malak El Sayed, 4 and Christiano El Sayed, 3. The two however separated in November 2016.

Since their separation, Cherry has lived as an illegal migrant as her visa and work permit expired. She now lives with a group of 4 other Kenyan ladies in a two roomed apartment alongside her 2 children. A group of Nuns had assisted her with upkeep supplies until 2019 when the assistance stopped, exposing Cherry and her children to extreme suffering.

The other challenge for Cherry relates to her two children. Both children are registered under their biological father’s name and this therefore requires the consent of her separated husband. The husband is still in Lebanon and has allegedly been demanding the custody of the children too besides threatening Cherry with serious death threats if she fails to comply. The situation got even worse after the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic. Increased movement restrictions and social distancing meant that even the few petty jobs became rarer and the mainly Arab population looked down on migrants as the part of the problem

Cherry’s effort to get assistance from the Kenyan Consulate in Lebanon bore no fruit. Instead, she claims to have been met with demands for money and sexual favours to facilitate her repatriation besides a host of other humiliating insults.

Cherry’s plight was brought to CHTEA’s attention by her aged mother, Mama ‘Cherry’ on 9th June 2020. Dorcas had visited the Ministry of Foreign Affairs where she was only given a number to call or write to since the work environment did not allow for face to face meetings. She

immediately proceeded to CHTEA's office in South 'B' where she met with Sr Mary O'Malley (Executive Patron) and Mutuku Nguli (Chief Executive Officer). Mama 'Cherry' presented a letter to CHTEA asking for help with following up on her daughter's case. Immediately after Cherry's mother left, CHTEA contacted her daughter in Lebanon who further provided important information and documentation to support her case. After cross checking all the information given, there was sufficient ground to embark on the case.

The first step was to write a letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) seeking to understand why it had not been possible for 'Cherry' to be assisted. MFA reverted with a letter inviting CHTEA to visit their office (allowing only 2 officials due to Covid-19). Cherry immediately received a courtesy call from the Kenyan Embassy in Kuwait seeking further clarification of her case and assuring her that all would be well. 'Cherry' was further assured that once international flights resumed, the embassy would organise for her repatriation alongside her two children; but this would only be possible if she got enough money to buy tickets. The embassy pledged to work on the documentation of the children.

When 'Cherry' got back to CHTEA about the ticket issue, a quick letter was drafted and sent to Talitha Kum (a Rome based Global Women Religious network) with a request to support her with whatever was possible. After back and forth correspondence between CHTEA and Talitha Kum, Cherry's case was finally picked by the latter and handed over to a Lebanon based organisation who together with an attorney met Cherry on Monday, 20th July 2020 and processed her matter. Cherry had to fill in bio data papers as a means of supporting the validation process to get confirmation of tickets. In the meantime, Cherry is working on regularizing all travel documents for both herself and her 2 children.....the availed attorney is closely involved as well as the Kuwait Embassy.

Cherry's case is a master piece of how a global system can be activated to effectively support a counter human trafficking situation, during this Covid-19 period, regardless of location. It is fairly clear that Cherry may be back to Kenya any time as soon as International flights resume in August 2020.