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Bangladesh

Memorandum on
adoption
arrangements to
Denmark
1975–82



Ankestyrelsen

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Introduction

1.1 SCOPE

Between 1975 and 1982, a total of 196 adoptions from Bangladesh to Denmark were arranged through Terre des Hommes. Most of the children were adopted between 1975 and 1978.

The report from the Netherlands states that the director of Terre des Hommes Denmark is suspected of being one of several masterminds behind a systematic, illegal adoption scheme from Bangladesh, in which children were given up for adoption without their biological parents' knowledge. The serious allegations against the director of Terre des Hommes Denmark raise the suspicion that the head of a Danish adoption agency independently engaged in unlawful conduct by facilitating such illegal adoptions.

The purpose of the National Social Appeals Board's investigation is to gather information and insights regarding the allegations made against the director of Terre des Hommes Denmark, and the potential implications for the organisation's operations in Denmark.

Basis of information

The investigation is based on the documents and information available regarding Terre des Hommes' adoption placements from Bangladesh during the period 1975–82.

The Appeals Board has reviewed the documents in 28 randomly selected specific adoption cases arranged by Terre des Hommes. The 28 cases are distributed across the years 1975 (6 cases), 1976 (14 cases) and 1977 (8 cases). The cases have been retrieved from the Board's own archives.¹

It has not been possible to obtain Terre des Hommes Denmark's general files on resettlement from Bangladesh. Terre des Hommes did not transfer general files or documents concerning the organisation's resettlement work to the Directorate of Civil Law when the organisation was wound up in 1999. Nor does the National Archives hold such information.

We have selected cases from the period 1975–1977 because the information from the Dutch report that may be relevant to the placement in Denmark relates specifically to this period.

¹ The National Social Appeals Board holds all international adoption cases arranged through Terre des Hommes.

The information in the specific cases regarding the adoptees and their backgrounds is very limited. This applies not only to adoptions from Bangladesh, but is also characteristic of adoptions from other sending countries in the 1970s.

In addition, the Appeals Board has reviewed general cases from the Ministry of Justice, the relevant adoption authorities and the Adoption Board, which oversaw international adoption during the period in question.

The information held by the adoption authorities at the time has been obtained via the National Archives. These are cases found in physical archives via filing plans. They concern cases relating to general cooperation on placement during the period 1975–82.

The archives have been held by various authorities, and as search options are limited, it cannot be ruled out that other cases of significance may exist.

The Appeals Board has not reviewed general cases from the period after 1982 and cannot therefore rule out the possibility that cases relevant to this investigation may exist from that period. The Appeals Board has not searched the archives of other authorities and cannot therefore rule out the possibility that such archives may contain information relevant to this investigation.

Information from the Dutch authorities

The Appeals Board has been in dialogue with the Dutch authorities regarding the possibility of gaining access to the documents setting out the background to and the specific charges against the director of Terre des Hommes Denmark. Unfortunately, it has not been possible for the Dutch authorities to share the relevant supporting documents with us.

Information from the Dutch report

2.1 RELEVANT ISSUES IN RELATION TO THE PLACEMENT IN DENMARK

The information below concerns the placement from Bangladesh which, in the opinion of the National Social Appeals Board, may be relevant to this investigation into Danish adoption placements from that country.

2.1.1. A Danish adoption agency is implicated in an investigation into illegal adoptions

The Dutch report describes a specific case in which the Dutch organisation and the Dutch authorities were aware of unlawful conduct in the adoption placement process from Bangladesh.

The case concerns a series of allegations made in 1977 by an English doctor – Dr Preger – against the director of the Dutch organisation in Bangladesh, the head of the Directorate of Social Welfare in Bangladesh and the head of Terre des Hommes Denmark.

Dr Preger had previously been associated with Terre des Hommes. In the spring of 1977, he had been contacted by two mothers who claimed that the director of the Dutch organisation and other staff at Terre des Hommes had persuaded them to send their children to the Dutch children's home, where the children would receive food, clothing and an education. When the two mothers went to visit their children, they had disappeared.

In light of the two women's allegations, Dr Preger began his own investigation into the matter. In his own investigation, Preger concluded that the head of Terre des Hommes Denmark, together with the director of the Dutch organisation in Bangladesh and the head of the Directorate of Social Welfare, had been involved in illegal adoptions from a refugee camp from which at least a hundred children had disappeared.

Dr Preger informed the Bangladeshi authorities of these allegations in June 1977, following which a five-year investigation took place, though it did not lead to any real clarification of what had happened. Dr Preger also informed the US Consulate and the Dutch Embassy in London of his investigation. Dr Preger also passed on the names of 25 biological mothers to the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

It is not clear from the report whether Dr Preger also informed the Danish authorities of the matter. Nor has the Appeals Board found any information to substantiate this.

In July 1979, a commission in Bangladesh concluded that Dr Pregers' allegations were groundless and false. Within the Dutch Ministry of Justice, however, the reliability of the Bangladesh commission's conclusions was called into question.

In March 1982, new information emerged in Bangladesh regarding the trafficking of children for international adoption, which cast doubt in the public eye on the conclusions from 1979. The director of the Dutch organisation in Bangladesh was subsequently arrested by the Bangladeshi authorities on suspicion of child trafficking².

International adoption was banned in Bangladesh in 1982, whilst the director of the Dutch organisation in Bangladesh was acquitted of all charges in 1983.

² The director of Terre des Hommes in Denmark passed away in 1979.

CHAPTER 3

Cooperation between Bangladesh and Denmark

3.1 DENMARK'S COOPERATION WITH BANGLADESH

Between 1975 and 1982, a total of 196 adoptions were arranged from Bangladesh to Denmark via Terre des Hommes. Most of the children were adopted between 1975 and 1978. By comparison, 495 adoptions were arranged from Bangladesh to the Netherlands between 1972 and 1984.

	Bangladesh
Denmark	196 adoptions ³ (1975–1982)
Netherlands	495 adoptions (1972–1984)

The New Zealander Lindsay Alan Cheyne (hereinafter Cheyne) was Terre des Hommes' representative in Bangladesh. In the opinion of the National Social Appeals Board, he also acted as a liaison officer. Cheyne thus acted as a link between Terre des Hommes Denmark's adoption department and the authorities in Bangladesh.

In 1972, the Bangladeshi authorities had established a project known as the Inter-Country Child Adoption Project. The project was administered by the Director of Social Welfare under the Bangladeshi Ministry of Social Welfare, and, in accordance with the regulations, all international adoptions from Bangladesh were to be arranged through this channel.

It appears from a general case⁴ that, for administrative reasons, the adoptions to Denmark were registered under Cheyne's name in Bangladesh. The Board assumes that this refers to the fact that Cheyne was Terre des Hommes Denmark's approved partner in Bangladesh, as evidenced by the organisation's authorisation from the Ministry of Justice.

Terre des Hommes Denmark had its own children's homes, initially in the capital Dhaka and later also in the city of Chittagong.

³ The table does not include international adoptions that may have taken place during the period without the assistance of adoption agencies (private adoptions).

⁴ This is stated in a newsletter from Terre des Hommes sent to the Adoption Board in 1978.

It is stated in another of the general cases⁵ that the children's home in Dhaka was administered by the adoption department of Terre des Hommes Denmark and, locally, by Cheyne. It is also stated that Terre des Hommes Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands and France had access to some of the places at the children's home until 1977.

3.1.1. The financial aspects of the collaboration

Until the end of 1976, applicants had to pay 9,500 Danish kroner to Terre des Hommes to have a child from Bangladesh placed with them. Thereafter, the fee rose to 10,000 kroner.

In its review of the case, the Appeals Board has not found any accounts or similar documents that provide a comprehensive insight into the financial aspects of the agency's operations in Bangladesh.

The information provided primarily reveals that Terre des Hommes's children's home operations were funded through the fees. A Terre des Hommes newsletter from December 1975 states that a small portion of the fee covered travel expenses. The remainder went towards the organisation's work with the children's home in Dhaka. Another newsletter from September 1976 states that the fees covered the children's home's rent as well as staff salaries, the majority of whom were locally employed carers and social workers. The same newsletter states that Danish adoptive parents collectively sent 230,000 kr. towards the start-up and running of the children's home in Dhaka in the 1975 financial year.

In addition to the fees that were due, the National Social Appeals Board's review also shows that Terre des Hommes in Denmark asked the recipients of its newsletter to make donations towards the first year's rent for the children's home, as well as for essentials such as nappies and a fridge.

It is not specified in detail how the total fee was allocated to the individual expenses, including whether the representative received a portion of the fee personally.

Between 1975 and 1982, financial arrangements in international adoption were not regulated by Danish legislation or by the Danish authorities. It cannot therefore be ruled out that there may have been financial incentives for the parties involved, as there were no rules governing the intermediary organisations' potential remuneration of contact persons or the payment of fees in the countries of origin.

⁵ This is evident from a newsletter from Terre des Hommes sent to the Adoption Board in 1978.

In international adoptions, it is common practice, both in the present day and historically, for applicants or organisations to cover certain costs associated with the processing of the case abroad. These may include, for example, expenses for translation, medical examinations, legal assistance, the issuance of specific certificates, etc.

3.1.2. The context in Bangladesh

The Dutch report states that in March 1971, civil war broke out between Pakistan and the so-called Bengal region. The war resulted in up to 3 million civilian deaths and around 10 million internally displaced persons. The Pakistani army used rape as a strategic weapon, and it is estimated that around 300,000 Bangladeshi women were raped, resulting in tens of thousands of unwanted pregnancies. In December 1971, the Pakistani army withdrew, and the independent state of Bangladesh was proclaimed.

The war devastated Bangladesh and the economy collapsed. Over 80% of the population lived below the UN poverty line. In 1974, famine broke out and hundreds of thousands of people fled, creating new refugee camps and increasing the pressure on existing ones. International humanitarian organisations, including Terre des Hommes, provided emergency aid in the camps, whilst also facilitating adoptions from the country.

3.1.3. The adoption process and regulations in Bangladesh

The adoption process and the rules in force at the time in Bangladesh are outlined below. This overview is based on information from the Dutch report.⁶

In 1972, the government of Bangladesh passed an adoption law permitting abandoned children to be adopted internationally. An abandoned child was defined as a child who, according to the government, had been abandoned or born out of wedlock. The Adoption Act was amended in 1978 and thereafter applied solely to genuinely orphaned children. In 1982, the government of Bangladesh decided to repeal the law on international adoption, following which international adoption was banned. However, it is likely that international adoption remained possible if the adoptive parents themselves had been adopted from Bangladesh.

⁶ The National Social Appeals Board has not found any information in the Danish archives regarding the rules on consent to adoption that were in force during the period 1972–1982.

The Dutch report contains a step-by-step description of the adoption process in Bangladesh.

1. The biological parents were required to sign a “Declaration of Relinquishment” in court, in which they relinquished their rights as “caregivers”. The document was drafted in English and was identical in all adoption cases. There is no mention of consent to the adoption. The first part of the document contained personal details of the person relinquishing their rights, such as name, religion, profession and address.
2. The guardianship was then transferred to the Ministry of Social Affairs in Bangladesh, and the child was placed in a children’s home.⁷
3. The Dutch organisation presented the applicants’ cases to the authorities in Bangladesh and subsequently arranged the matching of the child with the applicants.
4. The Bangladeshi authorities (Ministry of Social Affairs) then had to approve each individual matching proposal. In this connection, the Ministry issued a document known as the ‘Transfer of Guardianship’ or ‘Blue Paper’. This transferred parental authority from the authorities to either the adoptive parents or the Dutch organisation. No decision on adoption was made in Bangladesh.
5. The children’s home then arranged for a doctor, often employed by Terre des Hommes, to carry out a medical examination of the child. As part of the examination, the child’s age was estimated and recorded. This was because, at that time, there was no central birth register in Bangladesh, the children’s ages were often unknown, or the children were mentally or physically disabled.
6. The children’s home then drew up a background report on the child, which briefly outlined the reasons why the child needed to be adopted.
7. The organisation then applied for a Bangladeshi passport to be issued for the child, so that the child could travel abroad. The passport was sent to the Dutch consulate in Dhaka, which arranged a visa for the child

⁷ In the vast majority of Dutch adoption cases, the child was handed over to the Dutch organisation’s children’s home in the capital, Dhaka. As the sole intermediary organisation, the organisation had permission from the Bangladeshi authorities to arrange adoptions to the Netherlands.

This visa was issued on the basis of the Declaration of Relinquishment, the child's passport and prior approval from the Dutch authorities.

8. The child travelled to the Netherlands with an escort – typically an employee of the children's home. One year after arrival, the adoption was legally confirmed by a Dutch court on the basis of the aforementioned documents.

Analysis of the placement from Bangladesh to Denmark

4.1 THE SPECIFIC CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE DANISH PLACEMENT IN CONTEXT WITH THE INFORMATION IN THE DUTCH REPORT

4.1.1. The Appeals Board's review of specific cases

The Appeals Board's review of 28 specific cases from the period 1975, 1976 and 1977 generally reflects the adoption process as described in the Dutch report. However, the Appeals Board has also identified some variation, as shown in the review below.

Declarations of relinquishment and information about the child's 'caregivers' Overall, it does not appear from the cases reviewed that the biological parents have signed the declaration of relinquishment

"declaration of relinquishment", which is described as the first step in the adoption process. With this document, the biological parents were to relinquish their rights as the child's 'caregivers' in court. According to the Dutch report, the declaration was also to contain personal information about the person relinquishing their rights as a 'caregiver', such as name, religion, profession or address.

The statements are not included in the specific Danish adoption cases, nor are they mentioned. The National Social Appeals Board is therefore unable, on the basis of the cases reviewed, to determine whether the statement was used or not in the specific cases.

Due to the absence of these declarations, and because there is also no information available regarding the children's 'caregivers', it is not possible to determine where the children who were placed in Denmark originally came from.

From today's perspective, detailed information about the child's origins is essential in efforts to realise the child's right to know their identity. This may, for example, include information about the biological family's background and circumstances, information about the birth and place of birth, or similar details.

The child is placed in a children's home

According to the Dutch report, following the declaration of relinquishment, the social services were granted guardianship and the child was placed in a children's home – usually the Dutch organisation's own children's home in Dhaka.

A review of the 28 Danish cases shows that, in many instances (16 cases in total), the children stayed at Terre des Hommes Denmark's own children's home in Dhaka, which was presumably called the "International Baby Home." In a further 10 cases, the children lived at the Shishu Bhaban children's home in Dhaka or at one of a total of two other children's homes. In the last two cases, it is not clear where the children were staying prior to adoption.

Information on why and how the children were placed in care is generally very limited. In 12 cases, there is no information on this. In four cases, the children were found on the streets and handed in by local residents. In seven cases, the children were initially with their biological mothers or relatives, but were subsequently placed in the children's home. In one of the seven cases, it appears that the biological mother could not afford to care for the child. In four cases, the biological parents had either died or gone missing, and in one case the child came to the Terre des Hommes children's home from another children's home in Chittagong.

On the basis of its review of the cases, the Appeals Board is therefore unable to confirm or refute whether, in some of the cases, the children stayed in a refugee camp, as mentioned in the Dutch report, prior to their placement in a children's home.

The applicants' case in Bangladesh and the matching process

According to the Dutch report, the next step in the adoption process was for the Dutch organisation to send the applicants' cases to the authorities in Bangladesh for approval and then to prepare the matching of the child with the applicants.

The National Social Appeals Board's review of the cases shows that this was also the case in the Danish cases, although this part of the process is only reflected in two of the 28 cases reviewed. In these two cases, the applicants' application is included. It was the head of Terre des Hommes Denmark's adoption department who sent the application to the authorities in Bangladesh. In one of the two cases where the application is included, as well as in a further case where the application is not included in the Danish adoption file, the authorities in Bangladesh had questions regarding the applications. In the remaining cases, the applications that should have been sent to Bangladesh are not available.

As regards the matching of the child with the applicants, two cases show that the child was assigned to a specific couple of applicants. This is evident from letters sent by the head of Terre des Hommes' adoption department to the applicants. There is no information on how the matching took place in practice, but it appears that

It appears that it was Terre des Hommes that arranged for the applicants to be matched with a specific child, which presumably took place in Bangladesh. In both cases, it is also evident that the matching took place early in the process, before the documents concerning the children had been drawn up in Bangladesh, including the document certifying that the children were abandoned. In two other cases, the applicants themselves travelled to Bangladesh to find the child, but it is not clear from the case files how they came into contact with the child. In these two cases, the adoptions were apparently carried out with the assistance of Terre des Hommes.

The match is approved in Bangladesh, whereby parental authority is transferred

According to the description in the Dutch report, the authorities in Bangladesh (Ministry of Social Affairs) were required to approve each individual matching proposal. In this context, the Ministry issued a document entitled 'Transfer of Guardianship' or 'Blue Paper'. This transferred parental authority from the authorities to either the adoptive parents or the Dutch organisation. No decision on adoption was made in Bangladesh.

In the cases reviewed, a "transfer of guardianship" document is available in 23 of the 28 cases. The reason why the document is not available in the remaining five cases is not stated. In the cases where the document is present, it appears that the children were declared abandoned with reference to the "Bangladesh Abandoned Children Order, 1972, (Presidential Order No 124 of 1972)". This is the law referred to in Chapter 2, which permitted abandoned children to be adopted internationally. As mentioned, the definition of an abandoned child was a child who, according to the government, had been abandoned or born out of wedlock.

It is evident from the document in the 23 cases that both the head of the Directorate of Social Welfare in Bangladesh and Cheyne, the representative of Terre des Hommes Denmark, have signed. In the cases from 1975 and in some of the cases from 1976, A.M. Mozammil Hossain has signed as head of the Directorate of Social Welfare. In the remaining cases from 1976 and in the cases from 1977, Dr Mizanur Rahman⁸ has signed.

In a case from 1976, Mødrehjælpen in Denmark approves the adoption before the Transfer of Guardianship has been issued in Bangladesh

⁸ In 1977, Dr Rahman became the subject of Preger's investigation into alleged irregularities, see pages 17–18.

That is to say, before the child had been declared abandoned. Prior to this, the head of Terre des Hommes' adoption department had asked Mødrehjælpen to proceed with the case, even though the child had not yet been declared abandoned. The head had also, in a letter, asked the Danish National Police to authorise the Danish consulate in Dhaka to issue a visa for the child, even though the child had not yet been declared abandoned. It is clear from the case that the child was subsequently declared abandoned.

In other cases, the general procedure is that a Transfer of Guardianship is issued – i.e. the child is declared abandoned – at the same time as parental responsibility is transferred to the Danish applicants, and this takes place before the adoption is approved in Denmark.

Medical examination of the child

The next step in the adoption process, as outlined in the Dutch report, was for the children's home to arrange for a doctor to carry out a medical examination of the child. The doctors were often employed by Terre des Hommes. As part of the examination, the child's age was estimated and recorded. This was because, at that time, there was no central birth register in Bangladesh, the children's ages were often unknown, or the children were mentally or physically disabled.

The National Social Appeals Board's review of the cases shows that a medical report on the children is available in 27 out of 28 cases. The reports contain information on the children's physical and psychosocial condition. In the one case where no report is available, there are no documents at all from Bangladesh. The reason for this is not apparent from the case files.

The medical report was completed on a standardised form. One section of the report was completed by a doctor (concerning the child's physical health). The other section was completed by staff at the children's home. Much of the information and notes in the reports are repeated from child to child and appear very similar.

Several medical reports state the name of the biological mother and, in some cases, provide details of the period during which the child lived with her biological mother or at another children's home prior to placement. The date of placement is also stated. The report does not contain information about the course of the birth or where the child was born, e.g. at which hospital or clinic.

In general, the information in the available medical reports is very sparse. There is no consistent pattern as to whether the reports are dated before or after the Transfer of Guardianship.

It can also be noted that at least four different doctors carried out the examinations.

From today's perspective, detailed information about the child's origins is, as mentioned, essential. This may, for example, include information about the biological family's background and circumstances and/or details of the birth and place of birth.

Background report on the child

According to the process outlined in the Dutch report, the children's home was then required to produce a background report on the child.

The report was to briefly describe why the child needed to be adopted.

In the cases reviewed by the National Social Appeals Board, 19 cases include a report entitled 'nursing report' or 'child's progress report'. This was completed by one of the Danish nurses who worked at Terre des Hommes Denmark's children's home. However, the reports do not describe why the children needed to be adopted, but rather how the child is thriving and developing from a healthcare perspective, as well as what their daily life was like. At the same time, the reports state when the child arrived at the children's home and, in a few cases, that the child came from the streets. In some cases, there is a discrepancy between the date given for when the child was placed in the nursing report and in the medical report.

The Appeals Board assumes that the reports described correspond to the background report on the child, as outlined in the process description in the Holland Report, but this cannot be established with certainty. It can be noted that the Danish reports do not contain any information as to why the children needed to be adopted.

The case is closed

Once the documentation from Bangladesh was complete, the intermediary organisation, according to the Dutch report, had to apply for a Bangladeshi passport to be issued for the child so that he could travel abroad. The passport was sent to the Dutch consulate in Dhaka, which arranged a visa for the child. This visa was issued on the basis of the Declaration of Relinquishment, the child's passport and prior approval from the Dutch authorities. The child was then able to travel to the Netherlands with an escort – typically an employee of the children's home. One year after the child arrived in the Netherlands, a Dutch court ruled that the child had been officially adopted. The ruling was made on the basis of the aforementioned documents.

It does not appear from the National Social Appeals Board's review of the case that the organisation applied for Bangladeshi passports for the children. However, it is evident in several of the cases that the head of Terre des Hommes Denmark's adoption department asked the Danish National Police to authorise the Danish consulate in Dhaka, Bangladesh, to issue visas. The Declaration of Relinquishment and the child's passport are not included in the case files.

The review of the specific cases does not contain information about the children's journey to Denmark, including who escorted them. It is merely stated in the follow-up reports in several cases that the applicants collected their child at the airport in Denmark.

Overall, the review shows that there is considerable variation in the documents filed for individual cases and, consequently, in the information available. From today's perspective, this is not appropriate, but one possible explanation may be that the same filing requirements did not exist at that time. In this connection, the National Social Appeals Board notes that we have not had access to Terre des Hommes Denmark's general case files concerning the mediation, from which the general correspondence with the partner organisation would presumably be apparent.⁹

4.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE DANISH AUTHORITIES

With a view to gathering the relevant information held by the Danish supervisory authorities in the field of adoption, the National Social Appeals Board has, as mentioned, reviewed a number of general cases from the Adoption Board and the Ministry of Justice.¹⁰

The information that the agency has identified and deemed relevant is reproduced below.

4.2.1. Newspaper article from 1981

The Appeals Board has identified a newspaper article from 1981 concerning suspicions of illegal practices in adoption agencies

⁹ The Appeals Board has been in dialogue with Terre des Hommes regarding the general cases. Terre des Hommes has not been able to review its archives due to water damage.

¹⁰ These are cases in physical archives found via record schedules. During the period, the archives have been in the custody of various authorities, and given the limited search options, it cannot be entirely ruled out that other significant cases exist.

The article, which originates from Bangladesh, includes an interview with Dr Preger.¹¹ The article states that Preger began his investigation into the alleged irregularities in 1977. As part of the investigation, Preger and his staff interviewed parents at a refugee camp called Dattapara, from which 100 children had disappeared. The investigation led him to a man named Moslem Ali Khan, who ran the refugee camp and was, among other things, the head of Terre des Hommes Holland. But the investigation also led Preger to Khan's collaborators, who were Cheyne (the representative of Terre des Hommes Denmark in Bangladesh) and Dr.

Mizanur Rahman Shelley. Dr Mizanur Rahman Shelley was the head of the Directorate of Social Welfare, the authority responsible for approving all international adoptions from Bangladesh.

According to Preger, the three worked together to find children who had not been released for adoption and to arrange for their adoption abroad. According to the newspaper article, it was therefore not the head of Terre des Hommes Denmark's adoption department whom Preger accused of participating in illegal activities, but the organisation's representative in Bangladesh, Cheyne.

As regards the commission in Bangladesh, which investigated Pregers' allegations in 1979, the article states that it was composed of Dr Mizanur Rahman Shelley and three of his colleagues from the Bangladesh Directorate of Social Welfare. Furthermore, the interviews were conducted by Khan, who, like Shelley himself, was under investigation. According to a French nurse quoted in the newspaper article, who had worked for Terre des Hommes and Preger, the biological mothers were threatened into changing their testimony before they were to be interviewed by the commission. The article also states that two of the biological mothers who had accused Khan of stealing their children had reported that several parents were bribed to remain silent during the interviews.

According to the same French nurse, it was easy to arrange illegal adoptions in Bangladesh because no one checked whether the children had parents. People could be bribed into claiming they were the parents of a child, who could then be released. Or people could steal a child and claim they had found it abandoned. In such cases, the law required that an advertisement be placed in a newspaper to search for the child's parents. But according to the nurse, none of the parents could read, and none of them bought newspapers at that time.

¹¹ <https://people.com/archive/an-angry-doctor-battles-a-gruesome-black-market-in-asian-children-vol-16-no-23/>.

4.2.2. Review of relevant general cases from the Adoption Board for the period 1975–1984

A review of the Adoption Board's general case files shows that the Board was in possession of a newspaper article from the Jyllands-Posten dated October 1977, which refers to a specific case concerning the adoption of two children from Bangladesh. It appears that the children will be sent from Terre des Hommes' children's home in Dhaka back to a refugee camp if the family is not approved as adoptive parents before the New Year.

The review also shows that Terre des Hommes Denmark's representative in Bangladesh, Cheyne, announced in January 1979 that he intended to close Terre des Hommes' children's home. The closure was reportedly a reaction to Bangladesh having halted international adoptions. Despite objections from Terre des Hommes Denmark, Cheyne quickly closed the children's home and requested funds to continue the work of finalising the adoptions of the matched children. In August 1979, the chairman of Terre des Hommes Denmark travelled to Bangladesh.

Immediately after his trip, the chairman wrote a report on the situation in Bangladesh, which was published in Terre des Hommes Denmark's monthly newsletter, a copy of which was received by, amongst others, the Adoption Board. The report indicates that adoptions were a sensitive issue for the Bangladeshi government at the time, because a man from one of the voluntary organisations ('apparently an Englishman') had violated Bangladeshi adoption laws and illegally abducted a child to England. This had prompted a letter from the government in which the laws had been tightened, whilst all voluntary organisations were placed under suspicion, including those represented by Cheyne (Cheyne ran a school for street children alongside his adoption work). This general suspicion is cited as the reason why adoptions were suspended. The report also indicates that Cheyne had a very favourable and almost friendly relationship with the Director of Social Welfare, Dr Mizanur Rahman Shelley.

There is nothing in the records reviewed by the National Social Appeals Board to suggest that the Adoption Board was informed about the Preger case, or that Terre des Hommes Denmark was aware of it. We have found no information in the general files to suggest that the Adoption Board reacted when it was informed of Bangladesh's suspension of adoptions, even though the report states that Terre des Hommes is also under suspicion in connection with the circumstances that led to the closure.

4.2.3 Review of the Ministry of Justice's general files for the period 1973–1985

It is clear from one of the Ministry of Justice's general files from 1979 that the Ministry received a copy of a letter from Terre des Hommes addressed to the two other Danish intermediary organisations, Adoption Center and Glemte Børn. The letter states that the authorities in Bangladesh wish to have only one contact organisation from each of the countries that adopt children from Bangladesh.

It further states that Terre des Hommes' representative, Cheyne, has emphasised that "tremendous troubles" if the authorities' wishes are not respected, as adoption is a highly sensitive issue locally.

There is nothing in the general files to suggest that the Ministry of Justice was informed about the Preger case or reacted to the information provided by Cheyne.

Findings of the study

By today's standards for international adoption placement, there were undoubtedly insufficient safeguards in the Bangladeshi adoption system during the period 1975–82, or in the Danish placement process, to ensure that the best interests of the child were the guiding principle in each individual adoption. This is reflected, among other things, in the fact that there was insufficient regulation of international adoption, and that there is generally scant information in the specific adoption cases regarding, for example, the child's background and release. At the same time, during the period in question, there was no regulation of the financial flows associated with the adoptions, which may have created an inappropriate incentive structure.

It cannot therefore be ruled out that methods of illegally removing children, as described in the Dutch report, have been used in the Danish cases.


Regardless of the fact that the charges against Terre des Hommes Denmark were not directed at the Danish director but at the contact person in Bangladesh, it cannot therefore be ruled out that the Danish cases have been affected by the illegal practices addressed in the Dutch report. Furthermore, two of the other individuals against whom charges were brought, according to the Dutch report, were responsible for the release and transfer of guardianship in several of the cases reviewed by the National Social Appeals Board.

Given the limited information available in the specific cases, and the fact that it has not been possible to obtain Terre des Hommes Denmark's general records regarding placements from Bangladesh, it is not immediately possible to conduct a detailed investigation into the factual circumstances of the specific adoptions.

However, information from a newspaper article from October 1977 suggests that some of the children placed by Terre des Hommes came from a refugee camp. The National Social Appeals Board has no information that can confirm or refute whether this is the same refugee camp from which, according to Dr Preger, 100 children disappeared.

From a professional adoption perspective, there is generally a high risk of unethical and illegal practices in international adoption arrangements if several of the factors that characterised the general conditions in Bangladesh at the time are present.

These factors include, amongst other things, sending countries where the majority of the population lives below the UN poverty line, where single or unmarried mothers face discrimination, where birth registration is inadequate, or where there is no



legal definition of full adoption, where a humanitarian catastrophe has occurred, and where national protection systems are only developed to a limited extent.

In countries of origin where the above circumstances apply, there is a higher risk that an adoption is motivated by, for example, poverty, discrimination against the biological parents, or financial gain for those involved. If the parties in the country of origin are unfamiliar with the concept of full adoption and its consequences, there is limited scope for giving informed consent.