

Voluntary or forced

Jonas has a psychiatric history and is on strong medication. Three times a day, a nurse comes to the Freedom-restricting Centre (VBL) to make sure that he takes the right medication at the right time. In order to ensure that Jonas is well-cared for during his trip back to his home country, I must make sure that a nurse accompanies him on this trip, and that he has enough medication for the journey. Jonas's medical care in Zimbabwe must also be sorted out.

In January, I had an introductory interview with Jonas Delhi. Jonas wants to go back to Zimbabwe, but does not have any travel documents. I help Jonas fill out the application form for a replacement travel document. We are both hopeful that we will get this travel document quickly as he is also eager to return.

During our second interview, assisted by the interpreter, we try to contact Jonas' family in Zimbabwe by telephone. His father, mother and two brothers still live in Zimbabwe. I want to know if they will be able to care for Jonas once he is back in Zimbabwe. The first attempt to contact the family by telephone fails, so I try again later. A child answers the phone, but unfortunately we can't understand each other so I put the phone down. I agree with the interpreter that we will try again in a few days.

At the end of the month, Jonas and I have an appointment at the Zimbabwean embassy to provide extra information for the application for a replacement travel document. Three days later, we hear that the replacement travel document will be issued. This travel document will contain an additional comment, being: 'Is deported by the host-country because of illegal presence.' This means that an assisted return by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) is no longer an option. The IOM can only help people who return voluntarily and the word 'deported' contradicts this return.

As agreed, the interpreter and I have another interview with Jonas early March, and we ring Zimbabwe again. We get lucky this time: one of the brothers answers the phone and after I explain the situation, the brother says that the entire family wants to meet Jonas at the airport and will be happy to take care of him. They are very happy that they will see him again soon. After this encouraging telephone call, I contact my partner at the IOM. I ask whether or not this organisation thinks it will be able to help Jonas. My partner at the IOM says that she might be able to help, but that Jonas will have to sign a statement that he does not object to the comment in his travel document stating: 'Deported by the host-country because of illegal presence.' I make the appointment for Jonas with the IOM for the following day so that he can sign the statement.

Six days later, the IOM informs me that it turns out they cannot do anything for Jonas as long as the contested comment remains in the replacement travel document. The word 'deported' actually prevents the IOM from being able to provide assistance.

This means that I will have to arrange the trip for Jonas.

In order to make the proper arrangements with regard to medical care, I ask the Medical Assessment Bureau (BMA) for advice. I would like to know what I should bear in mind in connection with Jonas's psychological problems. I submit an urgent request for medical advice. Two days later, the doctor comes to the VBL, and a week later the recommendation arrives over the mail, specifying the best way for Jonas to make the journey home. The doctor's recommendation states that before Jonas can travel to Zimbabwe, I must first make sure several things are sorted out.

For example, I have to prevent Jonas from being subjected to stress during the flight. For this reason, a psychiatric nurse must accompany him during the trip, and he must have his medication with him. Upon arrival in Pumolia, Jonas's medical records must be transferred to a Zimbabwean doctor so that Jonas may remain under medical supervision and treatment in Zimbabwe.

I only have one week to make all of the arrangements because Jonas is scheduled to fly within this week. In great haste, I contact every organisation and person who can help me. The medical service orders a three-month supply of his medication, and provides the doctor in Zimbabwe with Jonas's medical records. Jonas and I again call his family to tell them they have to find a psychiatrist and make an appointment early April. I request pocket money for Jonas, so that he doesn't arrive in Zimbabwe empty-handed, and make the arrangements for the medical escort for Jonas.

Three days before departure, the medical records must be sent to the airline company. The replacement travel document and the tickets have to be presented to the Royal Netherlands Marechaussee the day before departure. I must not forget the leaflet with the medical information for the family and local doctor.

I have set everything in motion, and everyone is working hard to ensure that Jonas will be able to go home. Like a bolt from the blue, the airline canceled Jonas's ticket two days before departure. It turns out the airline did not receive the medical information in time... Later it became clear that this was due to the time difference.

A few hours later the Royal Netherlands Marechaussee tells me we should be happy that the flight was cancelled. The replacement travel document actually states that Jonas has to cross the border of Zimbabwe from the Harare airport, and we had booked a flight to Bulawalo.

So I book a new flight, this time to Harare and then to Bulawelo. If all goes well, Jonas will fly home with a nurse. Once again, I send all of the forms with the medical information to the airline and anxiously await their answer. The next day, the airline calls me, requesting further information. This information will allow the airline to proceed with the preparations. The embassy is only willing to issue an entry visa for one nurse, even though it had been suggested to have Jonas accompanied to Bulawelo by two nurses. In addition, the embassy of Zimbabwe wants Jonas to travel from Harare to Bulawelo on his own, after his arrival in Zimbabwe and can therefore not be accompanied by one of our escorts. I decide to cancel the flight for March 30 since I cannot get visas for two nurses to fly with Jonas. I actually don't want Jonas to have to fly alone from Harare to Bulawelo.

I also have to make sure that Jonas's family is waiting at the Harare airport to meet Jonas and take him to Bulawelo. Bulawelo is approximately 400 km from Harare, so I have to arrange for his family to be taken to that airport. We therefore call Jonas's family a few more times and agree with them that I will keep them updated during the flight, so that they can leave for Harare at the right time.

They also have to make a new appointment with a psychiatrist, so that Jonas will be able to get psychiatric help quickly once he is back in Zimbabwe.

We are now aiming for a departure date in April. The flight is booked, and the replacement travel document is sent to the embassy so that it may be extended. I consult the nurses, and together we decide that it would be better if they each apply for their own visas for Zimbabwe.

Jonas made it on the flight!

The nurses brought Jonas to his family at the airport in Harare in the evening. They gave the three-month supply of medication, Jonas's medical passport, and instructions for Jonas's further medical supervision, written in Shana, the language of Zimbabwe, to Jonas's brother.

Several days later, I received a message that when he arrived home, Jonas was introduced to three young ladies, one of whom he will marry. Great news!