

Dear friends,

26 years ago a new-born baby was left on my doorstep. I run a school and orphanage in East Jerusalem and this wasn't the first time this had happened. An unmarried girl who gets pregnant is treated so badly in our society. Often they hide it from everyone. I decided to raise this girl as my own and we named her Hadyah, which means gift in Arabic. I myself was orphaned. I suffered as a child but a nice lady adopted me. History repeated itself. I got my angel, my Hadyah.

I often worried about Hadyah's future. She had no birth certificate or any other identity document. It was as if she didn't exist in this world. How would she be able to study, or work, or do all of the things that other people do? I went to many different lawyers to see what could be done but they all told me that it was impossible: without a birth certificate, the Ministry of Interior would never give her an ID card. I gave up hope.

One day, one of the girls in my school, an orphan, came to me and told me about an organization called HaMoked that had managed to get her an ID card. I decided to try.

I will never forget the first meeting I had with HaMoked's lawyer, Benjamin. He spoke directly to Hadyah, who was then almost 16 years old. He said to her: nothing is impossible. There is always hope. We will do our best for you. But you have to be very strong and also patient.

First we went to Family Court to have them recognize Hadyah under her name and birth date. Then we had to get the Ministry of Interior to accept this ruling. At first they refused but finally after many meetings, they gave Hadyah a paper that had to be renewed every year, so now she at least had something showing the authorities recognized that she existed.

Several years later we went back for another interview with the Interior Ministry. They asked: Hadyah, what do you want to do in your life? She told them: I need to be like everyone else. I need to work, to study. I want to travel abroad but I can't because I don't have anything. Finally after many years, they agreed to give Hadyah a temporary ID card. And the Ministry promised that after two years we could file a request for permanent residency - the status all East Jerusalem Palestinians have.

During this time I saw Hadyah change. She started to have dreams about her future: "I can study abroad if I want to," she told me one day; "I can choose whatever subject I want to study." Suddenly she could imagine having a future.

After two years, we returned to the Interior Ministry and filed the request for permanent residency status. We waited and waited. Then we received their answer: no, they said. Hadyah was not eligible for permanent residency. Temporary residency was good enough.

Hadyah's eyes were full of tears, of sadness and also of anger. Benjamin calmed her down, "We will keep fighting," he said. So she went home with some hope.

HaMoked took our case back to the Court. They argued that it was unreasonable to leave Hadyah in this temporary situation her whole life, that she had the right to live a normal life like anyone else.

We waited to hear the verdict. Then, just last month, Fatima from HaMoked called me: We succeeded, she said. The Judge said that within sixty days, Hadyah must get a permanent ID card.

I didn't know how to feel. Shock and joy and disbelief - all these things at once. And you should have seen Hadyah. She started to cry and shout for joy. "In the end I'll be my own person," she said, "I'll be Hadyah." It was so emotional.

My journey with HaMoked has been very long, and all along the way, everyone at HaMoked was so nice and so warm. We Palestinians in Jerusalem face a lot of problems. We need people like those at HaMoked to listen to us, to support us, to help us. They made the impossible possible in Hadyah's case - so I wish that everyone who needs help would be able to come to them and get help. I am so thankful for them.

Anyone who reads my story should support HaMoked, this warm place that never loses hope.

Thank you HaMoked,

Turkiyyah