

Nobody's Children

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Elizabeth Bartholet, professor of law at Harvard, presented this Friday, November 6, before the CIDH to defend "the most fundamental of rights" of children: the right to parents who love and care for them. Her presentation came in the midst of the recent rejection in Latin America of international adoption.

Her cause, of course, could not be more just. Among the reasons that exist to believe in humanity, in spite of everything, few are better than adoption that crosses barriers such as culture, race, nationality, class, religion, and all those labels within which we often shut ourselves, making us separate. Every parent who receives a child they barely know as their own, merely on the basis of their common humanity, and every child who trusts this stranger and calls him or her "mother" or "father," reestablishes, in part, the humanness of humanity.

And even so, in spite of the overwhelming statistics about the lives that in this way have received an opportunity, there are many among us who attack international adoption. Some do so because they prefer to leave children in orphanages instead of committing themselves to the work of fighting against problems like child trafficking. Many others are foolish enough to claim that international adoption deprives children of their right to their "cultural heritage," as if there were culture that one could take advantage of growing up raised by a legal entity within the cold walls of an underdeveloped shelter, and as if, in any case, it were more important to understand customs surrounding the accident of one's birth than to have someone to call "mommy."

Yet naturally children are the last thing such individuals are considering. They are more focused on feeding the pride of the tribe to bring water to their political mills. In this way, during the past four years they have caused international adoption to fall consistently. For example, it is projected that by 2010, United States citizens (the largest group of international adopters) will be able to make half the number of adoptions as in 2004. Peru, which in 1991 permitted 705 adoptions by United States families, in 2008 only allowed 38.

It is so good to know, in the context of such a disappointing state of affairs, that people like Elizabeth exist, who not only have legal arguments, but also the moral authority and the motivation to help orphans of the third world. It is not in vain that she has two children adopted from the atrocious Peruvian orphanages from the eighties who today are two successful college students in the United States, and to whom she gave for their whole lives, I am certain, the most loving and warm home that any human being could desire.