



Immediate Release

*ZIMBABWE EPWORTH VICTIMS OF ARSON ARRIVED JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA FOR RECONSTRUCTIVE SURGERY – TARIRO HOUSE OF HOPE TRUST, HARARE.*

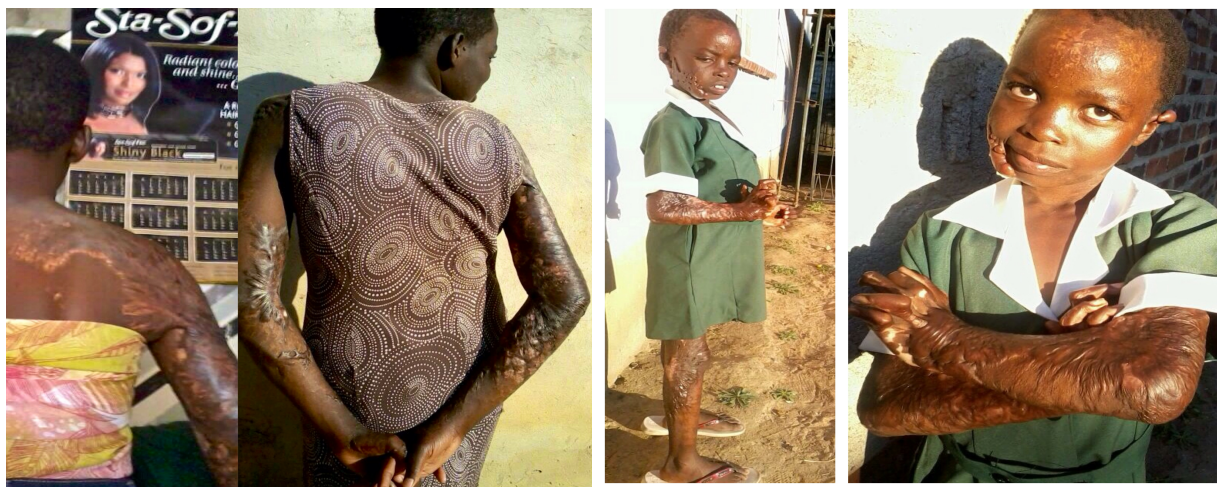
Tariro House of Hope (THH) has successfully organized and sent two of our girls, Mellisa Mutetwa-Makarati and Gamuchirai Vanessa Gohodza, victims of arson, to South Africa for reconstructive surgery.

On 19 April 2013, Mellisa then 8 years old; her sister Ruvimbo Makarati 12 years old and their cousin Gamuchirai Vanessa Gohodza 15 years old went to bed happy, healthy and whole. Gamuchirai along with her two sisters Colletta and Shamiso Gohodza had visited their late mother's sister, Ms. Lorraine Mutetwa. Their aunt, a widow and single parent lived in Epworth with her four children, a son Lovemore, and daughters; Rutendo, Ruvimbo and Mellisa. In February 2013, we, THH had incorporated Ruvimbo and Mellisa into our Feeding Program as their mother was struggling to take care of the large family on her own.

At midnight of 19 April 2013, Lorraine's disgruntled ex-boyfriend allegedly sprinkled petrol and set fire to the house where the family was sleeping. She had ended their relationship as she had discovered he was married. Four of the family members died a few days later. Although Ruvimbo, Mellisa and Vanessa survived the fire, rescued by their brother Lovemore; they were admitted to intensive care at Harare Hospital. Ruvimbo was the first to be discharged as her burn injuries were not as extensive as the other two. The perpetrator has since been charged with 4 counts of murder and 3 counts of attempted murder and is awaiting sentence.

THH together with the late mother's employers assisted the families with the funeral expenses. THH went on further to provide food, clothing, school fees and other needs for the children. Upon release from hospital, Ruvimbo and Mellisa, went to live with their maternal aunt in Chitungwiza, out of THH's sphere of influence though THH continued to provide support in cash and kind.

In May 2014, Mr Kuvandika, the maternal uncle of the children, informed the Founder and Director General of THH, Mrs. Regina Dururu-Okorafo who is based in Canada, of Melissa's deteriorating condition. After receiving updated pictures of the girls and coupled with the discussion earlier on, it became apparent, that Mellisa especially may have been released too early from the hospital and had lacked follow-up medical attention. It was at this point that Gamuchirai, who lived with her paternal grandmother in Mbare, became a THH beneficiary.



Left: Gamuchirai, part of her skin grafting fell off at some point. Right: Mellisa now 9 years old has limited use of her hands and can only walk slowly with difficulty. She needs help with almost everything.

It was clear that in order for the girls to live a full life, they required extensive corrective surgery, which is not available in Zimbabwe. The Director of Communications and Development for THH Ms. Julia Chandapiwa Zvobgo, also based in Canada, did some internet research and began contacting Surgeons and Organizations that could possibly help. Dr. Mark Steinmann, a Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeon in Johannesburg, responded within hours and advised that Melissa needed a multidisciplinary treatment program that included physiotherapists, occupational therapists and plastic surgeons. He went on to say, ironically, if she had been treated appropriately

from the beginning she may have been so much better than she currently is. He then referred Ms. Zvobgo to two organizations that could assist and Children of Fire responded immediately.

Children of Fire agreed to take care of Melissa and Gamuchurai on the condition that THH would arrange and secure medical reports, passports, visas and permission from the guardians of the girls for them to travel. THH was faced with the monumental task of helping guardians to process documents, which were non-existent; there were no records of Mellisa ever being born, i.e. no birth record and no records of her parents' deaths. Technically this meant that Mellisa did not exist and that Ruvimbo's parents were still alive and therefore she was not an orphan. All three girls were now double orphans.

THH Directors and staff, worked tirelessly with the girls' uncle Mr. Kuvandika, while Justice for Children and Child Line provided guidance with regards to acquisition of legal guardianship, birth and death certificates. THH thanks Dr Collin & Mrs Pat Warambwa and Dr Pedzisayi who provided free, medical examinations and reports required by Children of Fire; Harare Passport office and the South African Embassy. THH also thanks Mr. Conlon who along with other friends of THH helped to follow up passport processing while Mr. Conlon went on to assist processing the visas and drove the girls to Johannesburg.

Mellisa and Gamuchirai's surgery and recovery may take up to two years. Children of Fire would like THH to fundraise for ongoing costs and also for repatriation costs for the girls in order for them, Children of Fire, to continue to help other children, victims of fire who come from all over Africa. THH is also looking for funds to place Ruvimbo in a boarding school for Form 1 in 2015.

Mr Kuvandika, is in desperate need of a job so he can take care of his family of five and share the responsibility of his nieces with the extended family. In May 2014, Mellisa was moved to his place, a couple of rented rooms in Prospect and Ruvimbo to another one of his sisters, in Waterfalls. He has 7 years' experience as a store clerk responsible for receiving and dispatching stock. His number is +263775209212.



Left: Ruvimbo      Right: Mellisa and Gamuchirai on their way to Joburg, with Mr Conlon in the background.



The day the girls arrived in SA: 5 December 2014 with their new mom for the next two years Bronwen of Children of Fire with Mellisa and Gamuchirai, Johannesburg, South Africa.



#### **About Tariro House of Hope Trust:**

*THH currently caters for 54 Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (OVC's) and is looking for well-wishers, donors and sponsors to support its programs i.e. provision of school fees, feeding, clothing, medical and psychosocial care. The majority of the children are complete orphans while some have one parent. There are 5 who come from a Child Headed Household (CHH). The children we work with face different challenges. In Zimbabwe Tariro House of Hope is registered as a Trust and in The Netherlands as a Foundation KvK No. 27266848.*

*Regina Dururu-Okorafo was born, raised and educated in Zimbabwe. Since inception of THH in 2002, she has been the major benefactor of THH. In the beginning she gave 100% of the funds and now she is giving about 95%, all from her personal contributions mostly from within Zimbabwe. THH is on a fund raising drive to expand our programs and services so we are able to do more, to do better and to reach farther.*

*"Hope is that thing inside us that insists, despite all evidence to the contrary, that something better awaits us if we have the courage to reach for it, and to work for it, and to fight for it" — President Barack Obama*

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