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Bud Wichers, a photo and video journalist from the Netherlands, has traveled the world to capture major conflicts and wars, including in Syria, Gaza, Libya and Ukraine. “I became a photographer because I believe in social justice, connecting people to make the world a better place,” he said recently. “If I weren’t adopted, those feelings might not have been so strong.” Bud was among 3,040 Indonesian children who were adopted by Dutch nationals between 1973 and 1983. While he acknowledged that his adoptive Dutch parents had given him the opportunity of a better life, he still longs to know his birth

parents. For years he has attempted to retrace his roots in Jakarta.

His adoption documents identify him as Budiman, born in 1977 to a couple named Rusdi and Mustiah who lived in Gang V of Jl. Dukuh Pinggir in Tanah Abang, Central Jakarta. His Dutch parents adopted him from Kasih Bunda orphanage — now Loka Kasih — on Jakarta’s outskirts in 1978. Bud has visited both places but found no substantial information. Last year on Nov. 20, he once again visited his birth parents’ supposed home address on Jl. Dukuh Pinggir, a kampung located just behind luxurious shopping malls and office towers along the Hotel Indonesia traffic circle. An elderly woman named Esni said Bud’s mother, Mustiah, had lived there but had moved to Tangerang, Banten, with her daughter several years ago. This information gave him a surge of hope – but it did not last long.

Bud connected with another Indonesian adoptee in the Netherlands who has the same two people’s names on her adoption document. However, DNA tests showed that they were not related. “I believe [...] my adoption papers were doctored; I’m not sure about anything in those papers anymore,” he said. “I have no clue where to go from here.” Bud Wichers as a baby at the Bunda Kasih orphanage, now Loka Kasih, in Tangerang, Banten, in around 1978, just before his adoption to a Dutch couple. (Courtesy/Bud Wichers) Long-overdue apology Falsified adoption documents have become a significant hurdle for many Indonesian adoptees trying to track their roots.

Ana Maria van Valen, the cofounder of the Mijn Roots Foundation, said forged documents often indicated that the adoptions were illegal. Mijn Roots has reunited 38 Indonesian adoptees with their birth parents and is helping another 87 to date. “We have found 38 mothers. Sometimes we found out that the story is not what is stated in the papers. Some mothers never gave up their babies,” Ana said. “In my case, my mother never wanted to give me up. My mother asked a lady to take care of me so she could work in Jakarta.

When she came back, I was gone. But in the papers, it is stated that my mother had given her permission [for the adoption].” At the age of 18, Ana Maria van Valen (left) reunites with her mother in Bogor, West Java. Ana and Christine Verhaagen – both Indonesian adoptees in the Netherlands – cofounded the Mijn Roots Foundation in 2014 in efforts to reunite adoptees with their birth families. (Courtesy/Ana Maria van Valen) In 1983, the Indonesian government uncovered a slew of illegal adoption cases, implicating orphanages, birth clinics and midwives, and subsequently banned overseas adoptions. But in the Netherlands, it took almost four decades for the Dutch government to admit the wrongdoings. For years, adoptees from Indonesia, Colombia, Brazil and several other countries repeatedly called on the Dutch government to investigate and apologize for its problematic adoption process. The long-overdue apology finally came on Feb. 8 following a government commission’s investigation into adoptions from Brazil, Colombia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh from 1967 to 1998.

The commission found that some children had been stolen or bought from their birth parents under economic pressure or false pretenses. The investigation also detailed different types of structural abuses, including Dutch officials overlooking falsified documents, fraud and corruption. The findings prompted the Dutch government to suspend adoptions from abroad. “When it comes to mistakes made in the past, adoptees should be given recognition, and they should be able to rely on our help and assistance in the present,” Legal Protection Minister Sander Dekker said in a statement in February. The Dutch government said adoptees would receive support from a national expertise center during all stages of the search for their roots, as well as sociopsychological and legal assistance. Ana and Bud welcomed this move, with Bud saying: “I believe it’s a big step in the right direction from the Dutch government. I’m grateful for that.” The Dutch government has allocated 1.2 million euro (US\$1.43 million) to support adoptees from different countries, including Indonesia. “They will now give funding to organizations that support adoptees, but not for individual searching cases. We have applied for that, and the [related] ministries are still discussing this,” Ana said. “An adoptee could spend thousands of euro for tickets, accommodation, searching, mental healthcare, DNA tests and other [requirements].”

Not always a happy ending At Mijn Roots, Ana and her team try their best to provide emotional support to adoptees. Ana realizes that some Indonesian adoptees face questions about their identity, which often leads to depression and other mental health problems. Ana, who was adopted at the age of 2.5 years old, also faced similar problems. “Being separated from your biological mother and losing that special [bond] can be a traumatic experience. I know some adoptees who really find it hard to cope with that,” she said. “You come from a different culture, your family has different characters. You are Indonesian in the Netherlands. But in Indonesia, you feel more Dutch.” When an adoptee finds their parents, it does not always mean a happy ending.

Adoptees may find it hard to adjust to the birth family's culture — and sometimes their unrealistic expectations. “Sometimes the family thinks that the adoptee is very rich and they ask for [financial] support,” Ana said, noting that such expectations sometimes prompted adoptees to sever ties with their birth parents. Bud knows that finding his biological parents may not lead to a fairy-tale reunion. He also acknowledges that his search has become even more difficult with the discovery of what is likely false information on his adoption papers. Nevertheless, he will continue to look for his birth family in Indonesia. “I am thankful for the opportunities my adopted parents gave me, but I am also sad for my biological parents who never had a chance to raise me.”

Editor's note: Find more about Dutch-Indonesian adoptees on the Mijn Roots Foundation's official website and Facebook page. If you have any information about Bud Wichers' birth parents, please email infomencariorangtuakandung@gmail.com. TOPICS : adoption #adoption adoptees #adoptees Dutch-Indonesians #Dutch-Indonesians The-Netherlands #family family