Welcome to Spotlight. I’m Ryan Geertsma. And I’m Liz Waid. Spotlight uses a special English method of broadcasting. It is easier for people to understand no matter where in the world they live. In 1981, María Luisa Torres was pregnant. She was a single mother from central Spain. She had separated from her husband. And she was already raising a young daughter alone. Torres did not want to give her baby to another family permanently. But she needed help. She looked for someone to care for her baby until she was able to support it. Torres found Sister María Gómez Valbuena. She believed this religious worker would help her. On March 31st, 1982 Torres gave birth to a baby girl. After, Torres asked Valbuena if she could see her baby. Valbuena did not bring Torres her baby. In fact, Torres would not see her baby again for nearly 30 years. Torres believes Valbuena stole her baby and sold it to another family. This may seem like an extreme story. However, thousands of Spanish families claim to have similar experiences. Today’s Spotlight is on Spain’s "ninos robados" or “stolen children.” The story of Spain’s “stolen children” is about an illegal practice that lasted almost 60 years. Recently, more than 1,000 people have made official legal claims against medical and religious workers in Spain. These individuals believe that hospital workers illegally stole their newborn family members. Many of the families believe hospital workers lied to them. The workers told them their babies had died. For years, the families mourned their lost sons and daughters, brothers and sisters. But now, many families believe that their babies did not die. Like María Luisa Torres, they believe hospital workers took their babies and sold them to other families. Many people believe the story of Spain’s “stolen children” is even bigger than the official claims. Some experts believe hospital workers around Spain stole and sold hundreds of thousands of babies between the 1930s and 1990s. The Spanish public first began to learn about the story of Spain’s “stolen children” in 2008. At this time, Spanish legal officials began researching cases of stolen babies connected with the Spanish civil war. In the late 1930s, Spain suffered through a civil war. After, Francisco Franco became the country’s new leader. The country was divided. Franco wanted to strengthen his power. A social scientist in Franco’s government proposed an idea. Instead of killing his opponents, Franco could take the newborn babies of people who opposed him. Then, he could give the children to families that agreed with his political views. Franco’s secret police worked with hospital workers to identify and remove children from women who opposed the government. Often, these mothers were already in prison for opposing the government. Experts believe that Franco’s government stole as many as 30,000 children in the late 1930s. Franscisco Gonzalez de Tena is a sociologist. He has studied the history of Spain’s “stolen children.” He explains that this terrible practice lasted long after the war. Over the years, it became less about politics. Instead, he says that many people saw it as an issue of money. Many people in Spain wanted to adopt - they wanted to welcome a child into their family and raise him or her as their own. However, the legal adoption process was difficult. And it took a very long time. De Tena told the Spanish newspaper, El Pais: “There was a great demand for children to adopt. And there were a lot of people prepared to find a way to meet that demand.” Around the country, there were already groups of people that had worked with Franco’s government to remove babies from particular families. Now, these same networks of people could take and sell babies for profit. Enrique Vila is a lawyer. He represents many families that made legal claims against hospital and religious workers. He told the Spain Review newspaper: “There were separate groups all around Spain. But they had to know each other. When a woman found parents who wanted to adopt a baby, she knew what hospitals to call to get that child.” It seems impossible that these networks could have stolen so many babies, for so long. However, many of the families report similar stories. Often, the mothers were poor or did not have husbands. When the mother gave birth, hospital workers would take the baby away before she could see it. Then, they would tell her that the child had died. The hospital would bury the child for the family - and no one would ever see the baby’s body. Often, the family would not question the medical or religious worker’s authority. They would believe them. And the family would go home without their child. This is similar to the story of María Luisa Torres - the woman from the beginning of this program. Torres says that Sister María Gómez Valbuena told her that her baby had died. However, Torres did not believe Valbuena. So, Torres asked Valbuena about her baby again. This time, Valbuena admitted to Torres that she had given her baby to another family. Torres was angry. She wanted to report Valbuena to the authorities. But she was afraid. Torres told the Global Post news organization that Valbuena threatened her. Torres explained that Valbuena said, "I will report you to the authorities. I will tell them you had sex with a man that was not your husband. You will go to jail. Then I will also take away your 2-year-old daughter.” Officials have not yet proven any legal charges against Sister Valbuena. However genetic tests have proven that Torres’ daughter is alive. Torres and her daughter María Pilar have now met. They are happy to be starting a relationship. However, thousands of other Spanish families are still waiting to learn more about their lost children. María Luisa Puro Rodríguez is one of the many mothers who now believes hospital workers may have stolen her baby. In 1976, she did not question the doctor’s authority. But today, things are different. She told the New York Times newspaper: “We now happily live in a society where it is normal to question what we hear. I have learned a difficult lesson. I am now ready to fight all the way - to find out what actually happened.” The writer of this program was Dianna Anderson. The producer was Michio Ozaki. The voices you heard were from the United States and the United Kingdom. All quotes were adapted for this program and voiced by Spotlight. You can listen to this program again, and read it, on the internet at www.radioenglish.net. This program is called “Spain’s Stolen Children.” You can also find us on Facebook. Just search for spotlight radio. We hope you can join us again for the next Spotlight program. Goodbye!