Bolivian Girl Mauled By Dog To Fly To U.S. For Reconstructive Surgery

Carlos Valdez

A 4-year-old Bolivian girl who was unconscious for nearly three weeks after being mauled in the face and body by a Rottweiler is awake and ready to fly to Boston for reconstructive surgery, a doctor said Tuesday.

The case of Rosalia, the fifth of seven children of a poor family in a slum outside La Paz, has been closely watched by Bolivians. It also drew the attention of the Boston Children's Hospital, which offered to send a plane and two specialists to pick up the girl, officials in Bolivia said.

On May 24, the girl went to a store with her mother to make some purchases when she was attacked by the storeowner's dog. The Rottweiler grabbed her by the head and ripped off a part of her scalp. It also left deep wounds on her face, back and buttocks, according to the doctors who treated her.

Her mother, Regina Pillco, said she couldn't get Rosalia out of the dog's jaws because she was carrying a newborn on her back.

The girl's father, Agustin Apaza, is formally unemployed and earns money calling out buses in the public transportation system. He will accompany Rosalia to Boston.

Rosalia was unconscious and wrapped in bandages until last Wednesday, when she woke up, asked for her mother and began crying.

On Tuesday, Dr. Alfredo Rodriguez, head of intensive care at the Bolivian children's hospital, said Rosalia is out of the most critical stage and is ready to fly to Boston.

"She is breathing by herself, she no longer needs to be intubated, and she is in condition of travel," Rodriguez said. "The wound to her right (cheek) is extensive; she has lost tissue and it reaches the bone. The girl needs plastic surgery to live in normal conditions."

Authorities in Bolivia say they expect the plane from the Boston hospital to arrive Thursday to pick up Rosalia. Permission for the plane to land in Bolivia is being arranged, said Concepcion Saenz, the official at the Children's Defenders office handling the paperwork.

Officials at the Boston hospital would not confirm the details about the flight, saying patient privacy laws prevented them from addressing such questions.

The case has aroused passions in this South American country, with a ruling party lawmaker calling for a law to prohibit ownership of breeds considered dangerous,

and pet owners in some cities marching to protest the initiative.

The slum where the family lives is a poor, high-crime part of Bolivia, and people sometimes keep attack dogs on chains to scare thieves away from their homes and businesses.

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