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U.S. Adoption Leaders Express Grief and Outrage Over Death of Russian-born Nina Hilt, Call for Immediate Changes to International Adoption Policies

Alexandria, Virginia – July 8, 2005 – Following today’s news of the tragic death of two-year old, Russian-born Nina Hilt, allegedly at the hands of her adoptive mother, the National Council For Adoption (NCFA) convened a meeting of leaders of accredited adoption agencies working in Russia. Together, the group is calling for immediate action and implementation of reforms, in order to prevent future cases of abuse.

“This news breaks the hearts of adoption professionals who are working to provide safe and loving families for Russian orphans,” says Thomas Atwood, president and CEO of NCFA. “The international adoption community in America is grieving over Nina’s senseless death, and calling for justice on her behalf. In sympathy with Nina Hilt and the Russian people, American adoption leaders are united in proposing strategic reforms to adoption policies. These reforms will prevent future tragedies, while still allowing safe and sound adoptions to move forward, for the sake of thousands of Russian orphans who find their loving, permanent families through international adoption each year.”

First among the National Council For Adoption’s recommendations is the swift implementation of the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption, by both the American and Russian governments. When ratified, this multilateral treaty will provide federal oversight of intercountry adoption processes, while establishing strict standards for professional practices among adoption agencies, government officials, and the courts. The treaty will also require official procedures that provide for effective pre-adoption and post-adoption parental training and reporting.

Second, NCFA calls for an immediate end to the troublesome practice of independent adoptions in Russia. Since 2001, the Russian government has recognized and accredited highly qualified agencies to work in Russia. These agencies meet the highest standards of accountability and ethical practices, as determined by Russian authorities. Agencies that do not meet these strict standards can lose their accreditation and be prohibited from operating in Russia.

Unfortunately, Russian law currently also allows independent adoptions, which do not meet the same strict requirements that accredited agencies do. Independent adoptions do not undergo the same level of scrutiny and often do not provide adequate levels of professional service. Nina Hilt’s adoption was, in fact, an independent adoption. Eliminating independent adoptions, and enforcing existing laws prohibiting facilitator adoptions, would greatly reduce the risk of future tragedies such as Nina Hilt’s.

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Finally, NCFA and agency leaders also call upon all American agencies to strengthen their screening processes to ensure the qualifications of prospective parents of Russian children and make adoptive homes safer. The group strongly urges that all agencies increase their efforts to evaluate and prepare parents to ensure that they are psychologically able to handle the unique challenges of parenting previously institutionalized children. NCFA also recommends that all agencies intensify post-placement services for parents who adopt Russian-born children.

Atwood continues, “Nina Hilt’s death is tragic. Such tragedies should never occur in any family, whether biological or adoptive, and wherever the child is born. But adoption has been the means by which more than 43,000 Russian-born children have left desperate circumstances in orphanages and have found safe, loving, and protective parents. The heartbreak of Nina’s death would be made even greater if a shutdown of Russian adoptions prevented many thousands of children from having families. NCFA urges Russian and American adoption leaders to work together to find ways to secure the benefits of adoption for children, while eliminating even the smallest risk.”

About NCFA

Since 1980, NCFA has been a leading voice among national adoption and child welfare organizations. NCFA is a research, education, and advocacy nonprofit that provides adoption information, promotes ethical adoption practices, informs public policy and opinion about adoption issues, and serves as a resource for women with unplanned pregnancies, adopted persons and their families, those seeking to adopt, and adoption professionals.

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