NCFA Reacts to News of Adopted Child “Returned” to Russia:
Adoption Advocates Condemn the Act but Pledge Support to Intercountry Adoption

Today, Russian news sources are reporting that a seven-year old boy, adopted in 2009 by an American adoptive parent from Tennessee, was placed unaccompanied on an airplane bound for Moscow. Reportedly, the child bore a note stating that he was being returned and the adoption voided. The child’s abandonment in Russia has been internationally criticized and now threatens the future of intercountry adoption between Russia and the United States. Senior Russian officials, including Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergey V. Lavrov, are calling for a suspension of adoptions to the United States pending the implementation of reform measures to prevent such acts.

The National Council For Adoption has confirmed that local law enforcement officials in Tennessee are investigating and charges against Nancy Hansen, the adoptive mother, are being considered.

“Child abandonment of any kind is reprehensible,” says Chuck Johnson, acting CEO of the National Council For Adoption. “The actions of this mother are especially troubling because an already vulnerable, innocent child has been further victimized.”

Reacting to Russian officials’ demands for a moratorium on intercountry adoptions, Johnson continues, “This news sends a false picture of intercountry adoption that now jeopardizes the lives of other children. If the reports are true, Ms. Hanson made a terrible, inexplicable decision. Fortunately, this single act does not represent intercountry adoption as a whole, or the commitment that American parents make to their children. Clearly, justice must be served, but a moratorium on adoptions would only hurt more children.”

Although more than 60,000 Russian orphans have received loving families through adoption in the United States, this event follows other tragic outcomes of children adopted from Russia. While the majority of internationally adopted orphans end up doing very well, adopting formerly institutionalized children is not without its challenges. Many of these children suffer physical and emotional challenges as a result of the shortcomings often found with institutional care.

NCFA restates its firm position that all prospective adoptive families must be thoroughly screened and prepared for the realities of parenting a post-institutionalized child. According to Johnson, “Due to the efforts of American and Russian governments, as well as the professionals in the adoption communities of both countries, the process of preparing prospective adoptive families pursuing international adoption and supporting those families after the adoption has improved significantly in the past decade. However, when something like this happens, it makes professionals re-examine further what they can do to prevent such actions. We pledge to work with the Russian adoption community to enhance protections for children and support services to the families that adopt them.”

U.S. Department of State officials are in talks with Russia to avert a full shutdown of adoptions. Johnson concludes, “Isolated instances like this are horrible, but in no way should prevent thousands of children from having families through intercountry adoption.”