FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
APRIL 12, 2010

MEDIA UPDATE: NCFA Joins Russian Officials and International Adoption Community in Decrying Abandonment of Adopted Child

Tragic Case is Unacceptable, but Should Not Dictate Intercountry Adoption Policy

Alexandria, VA – As initially reported last week, a seven-year old boy adopted from Russia in 2009 by an adoptive parent from Tennessee was placed unaccompanied on an airplane bound for Moscow. Sources in the media are reporting that the child bore a note stating that he was being returned and the adoption voided. The incident has generated international attention, angered Russian officials and American child welfare and adoption advocates, and now jeopardizes intercountry adoption between the United States and Russia.

The National Council For Adoption (NCFA) is closely monitoring the situation, offering its assistance as the situation unfolds. Chuck Johnson, NCFA’s acting CEO, says, “[Russian officials] are rightfully outraged that a minor child was placed, unaccompanied on a commercial flight only to be met at the airport by a stranger – hired by the family via the internet – to return the child to his orphan status.”

A family spokesperson has been quoted in press reports as stating that the child “began to demonstrate pathological behavior that caused them to fear for their safety four months into the adoption.” The family has further accused Russian orphanage officials with lying to them regarding the child’s mental health. Though the adoptive mother is reportedly a medical professional, it has also been reported that the family never sought medical or professional help for the child after he began to display behaviors that so concerned them, nor did they share their concerns with their adoption agency or other experts. The family is reportedly under investigation by local Tennessee law enforcement.

A small few have stepped forward in support of the family stating that the child’s behavior warranted such drastic steps being taken. “This type of ‘blame-the-child’ mentality infuriates me,” continues Johnson.

According to Russian practice, every child allowed for adoption by citizens of other countries is considered a child with special needs. Institutional care is never an adequate substitute for having
a family. Research shows that every month a child spends in institutionalized care has a demonstrably negative impact on a child’s physical and emotional well-being. While most internationally adopted children recover well from institutionalization, there will always be some for whom the effects will be life-long. With each passing year, the professional adoption community in America learns more about serving the unique needs of internationally adopted children.

Regardless of any unique needs, this child should not have been abandoned in this manner. Johnson says, “The family obviously put a great deal of thought and effort into researching online how they could rid themselves of their legal and moral responsibility to their son. If, instead, they had consulted the medical community or reached out to child welfare professionals, maybe this whole incident could have been avoided.”

Media reports attributed to Bedford County, Tennessee law enforcement personnel seem to question whether or not a crime has been committed, and that this determination may be based on whether or not the child is a U.S. citizen. Johnson contends, “Questions of child endangerment or abandonment should never be based on the victim’s citizenship. But let me be clear…This child is a U.S citizen. He was legally adopted in Russia; there is a final decree of adoption issued by the Russian Court. He traveled to the U.S. on an IR-3 visa, and, according to U.S. immigration law, he became a citizen of the United States the second that he touched ground in the U.S.”

“This did not have to happen in this way. There are resources in place that would have provided help to this family and child,” concludes NCFA’s Johnson. “I understand the outrage that so many Russians feel regarding what has happened. But I hope that no one loses sight of the fact that adoption tragedies such as this are highly unusual. With very few exceptions, internationally adopted children find safe, loving families in America. To allow the exception to dictate international adoption policy would be unfair to the thousands of waiting children in Russian orphanages.”

National Council For Adoption (NCFA) is an adoption advocacy nonprofit that promotes a culture of adoption through education, research, and legislative action. NCFA’s areas of focus are infant adoption, adoption out of foster care, and intercountry adoption. Passionately committed to the belief that every child deserves a nurturing, permanent family, NCFA serves children, birthparents, adoptive families, adoption agencies, U.S. and foreign governments, policymakers, media, and the general public as the authoritative voice for adoption.

# # #