NCFA Issues Statement Regarding Ethiopia Adoptions

At the end of February 2011, the Ethiopian Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs (MOWA) issued an unexpected directive indicating a dramatic reduction in the number of intercountry adoption cases to be processed by the Ministry. This directive is scheduled to go into effect by Thursday, March 10, 2011.

In 2010, more than 2,500 Ethiopian children were adopted by American families. Should MOWA implement the recent directive as indicated, the number of adoptions from Ethiopia could fall as much as 90%, although the full impact of MOWA’s decision is unknown and cannot be predicted at this time.

This ruling follows a year of significant progress in improving and increasing transparency in the Ethiopian adoption process. Following several safeguards enacted last year, NCFA’s confidence in the Ethiopian adoption system has grown significantly. Additional protective measures may still be necessary, however, to increase global confidence in the process. MOWA’s recent decision appears to have surprised many Ethiopian government officials, as well as the Central Adoption Authorities in the U.S., Italy, and Spain. Many within the adoption community, including the U.S. Department of State (DOS) and the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS), members of Congress, child welfare officials in many countries, and the National Council For Adoption (NCFA), have criticized the MOWA directive as unfair, unnecessary, and harmful to children in Ethiopian orphanages who await permanent families.

NCFA is grateful for the swift action taken by the U.S. Department of State, led by Special Advisor Ambassador Susan Jacobs, to communicate with Ethiopian adoption officials in an effort to reach a favorable resolution that will serve the best interests of abandoned and orphaned children in Ethiopia.

“We are encouraged by the advocacy taking place behind the scenes and hopeful that these collective efforts will bring clarity and an immediate adjustment to this unjust and unnecessary ruling, which has the potential to negatively impact so many vulnerable children,” said NCFA president and CEO Chuck Johnson.

Unconfirmed reports indicate that personnel changes within MOWA have resulted from the rogue handling of this decision, and because of this, NCFA is hopeful that new leadership will offer opportunities for better communication and a swift resolution to this looming crisis. NCFA respectfully calls on MOWA to amend its recent harmful directive and ensure that subsequent reforms reflect a comprehensive child welfare policy that retains the option of intercountry adoption for Ethiopian orphans while ensuring policies and procedures that serve the best interests of children.

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