



National Council For Adoption

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National Council For Adoption: Continued Decline in Intercountry Adoptions “Not Right, Not Good for Children”

November 17, 2011 – Alexandria, VA – The U.S. Department of State has just released the intercountry adoption numbers for FY 2011, published at http://adoption.state.gov/content/pdf/fy2011_annual_report.pdf. In 2011, 9,320 children from foreign countries were adopted by U.S. citizens. This represents a 15% decrease in the number of intercountry adoptions from FY 2010.

The number of intercountry adoptions peaked in 2004, when American families adopted more than 22,000 foreign-born children. Since then, however, the number of children adopted each year via intercountry adoption has steadily declined.

“This trend is not right, and it is not good for children. Given the increasing number of orphaned children worldwide, the continued decline in intercountry adoptions means that children’s most basic needs and rights are being denied,” says Chuck Johnson, president and CEO of the National Council For Adoption (NCFA). “As intercountry adoption programs close or decrease in number, more and more children remain in institutions and temporary care situations, aging out without ever securing their basic right to a permanent loving family of their own.”

It is important to acknowledge and work together to address legitimate issues of concern in intercountry adoption. Abuse and fraud in the adoption process should always be condemned whenever and wherever they occur, and it is the responsibility of all governments, child welfare workers, and adoption advocates to work to prevent such abuses. However, adoption process abuses are the exception and not the rule, and should not be exaggerated at the expense of the millions of children who still await love, safety, and permanency.

The Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption has provided both sending and receiving countries with guidelines in support of an ethical, more transparent intercountry adoption system that adheres to international standards. The Hague Convention is also intended to facilitate and promote adoptions for children in need of families; however, in practice, this does not always occur.

Many who oppose intercountry adoption due to national or cultural considerations offer no viable alternative for orphaned, abandoned, and vulnerable children, other than a continuation of the status quo. This is why it is critical for governments, non-governmental organizations, child welfare advocates, and international aid organizations to recognize and uphold the child’s right to a family as early in life as possible.

“We do not deny the importance of ethnic, cultural, or national identity,” says Johnson, “but extensive research, common sense, and our human compassion all tell us that children need more than food and shelter and mere survival. They also need and deserve love, security, and purpose — something that can only be provided by a permanent, loving family, which institutional care or other temporary alternatives can never provide even with the best of intentions.

“We call on UNICEF and other international aid organizations to expand their missions to include real and timely permanency options for children in institutional care, by advocating more strongly and proactively for intercountry adoption. Those who want better outcomes for all children, especially those who have been orphaned, cannot realize this goal without strengthening and supporting legal, ethical adoption as means of providing children with the permanent families that they need and deserve.”

All child welfare advocates have the responsibility to work to prevent family dissolution and child abandonment whenever possible. Also, when possible, families should receive the support and services they need in order to remain together. In parallel, domestic and international adoption programs should also be encouraged and supported, so that children in need of permanent care have the option of an adoptive placement as early in life as possible.

“For children who have no home, no family willing or able to care for them, or no realistic in-country permanent care option, intercountry adoption may represent their only chance for a safe, loving, permanent family of their own,” says Frank Garrott, president and CEO of The Gladney Center for Adoption.

“Tragically, too many of these children will never realize their intrinsic right to a family,” says Bill Rosen, an NCFA Board Member and Chairman of the Intercountry Adoption Committee. “Too many will move from temporary placement to temporary placement, or spend all their young lives in institutional care. Too many will experience great hardship, loneliness, abuse, inadequate nutrition, poor healthcare, and substandard education in underfunded and understaffed orphanages. Too many will then age out of the system with no real home and no family, ill equipped to support themselves and overcome the enormous challenges they face.”

Numerous studies have clearly proven the destructive effects of institutionalization on the physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing of children. Yet for many orphaned and abandoned children worldwide, an orphanage is the only “home” they will ever know.

In contrast, studies of adopted children have shown the tremendous benefits of adoption for children’s overall health, development, sense of security, and long-term outcomes. Given the large and increasing number of children in need of care who deserve permanency, intercountry adoption must remain an important part of a complete, holistic, child-centered welfare policy.

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Founded in 1980, the National Council For Adoption (NCFA) is an adoption advocacy nonprofit that promotes a positive culture of adoption through education, research, and legislative action. Through its core areas of focus—infant adoption, adoption out of foster care, and intercountry adoption—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.

More information is available on our website, www.adoptioncouncil.org.