



National Council For Adoption

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State Department's Intercountry Adoptions Report Highlights Failure to Meet the Needs of Children Without Parents

March 14, 2019 – Alexandria, VA – Today, the U.S. Department of State (DOS) released its FY 2018 Annual Report on Intercountry Adoptions.¹ The report shows that American families adopted only 4,059 children through intercountry adoption between October 1, 2017 through September 30, 2018. This is a decline of over 13% from the previous year, and over 82% decline since 2004. Adoptions from China dropped by over 22% in the past year — though at 1,475 it remains the country with the most adoptions to the United States.

“One of NCFA’s foundational values—and a cornerstone of the Hague Convention on Adoption—is that a continuum of child welfare options should prioritize family preservation, adoption by relatives, and domestic adoption options before intercountry placement is considered. Institutional care should be a last resort,” says National Council For Adoption (NCFA) vice president Ryan Hanlon. “While policymakers and advocates in many countries are taking strides to improve their nations’ child welfare practices, the reality is that, for hundreds of thousands of children worldwide, domestic family-based care options are not currently available to children, leaving them to languish in orphanages. Upon reaching adulthood, many of these children will lose access to the resources they need to survive safely on their own. Intercountry adoption provides a family to children growing up without parents — unfortunately, the opportunity of growing up in a family is realized for far too few children year after year. It does not have to be this way.”

Since the U.S. Department of State (DOS) assumed responsibility for the oversight of intercountry adoption in 2008, the number of abandoned, orphaned, and vulnerable children around the world extends into the tens of millions, yet the number of children adopted by American citizens continues to decrease annually under their oversight, to a new historic low of 4,059. For the past 11 years, NCFA has expressed ever-growing concerns about the state of intercountry adoption and DOS’s role in contributing to the decline — concerns routinely dismissed by officials at DOS who repeatedly have promised American prospective adoptive parents, Members of Congress, the Administration, and the media a new, improved, and robust intercountry adoption program. Today’s report fails to put the disastrous decline in perspective:

- There are millions of children without families worldwide who will benefit from intercountry adoption and tens of thousands of qualified American families who are willing to adopt them.
- The majority of orphans denied intercountry adoption are not finding equal or better solutions in their country of birth; on the contrary, they are living and dying in institutions in ever-growing numbers. Research conclusively shows that the majority of those who survive the orphanage experience will

¹ <https://travel.state.gov/content/dam/NEWadoptionassets/pdfs/Tab%201%20Annual%20Report%20on%20Intercountry%20Adoptions.pdf>

experience permanent emotional and physical harm and will age out into a world that will exploit them in horrible and degrading ways.

- There are countries that want to partner with the U.S. to find families for orphans, but unfortunately, the United States is unwilling to work with many countries around the world.
- DOS has chosen to focus almost all of their attention on the regulation of intercountry adoption and not its advocacy. In fact, a recent opinion² from a Federal Court in Washington state has said that, “[...][Department of] State likely acted unlawfully in several respects...” in the heavy-handed way they regulate intercountry adoption.
- There have been very credible reports³ alleging that certain employees at DOS tasked with overseeing intercountry adoption are personally biased against intercountry adoption and sabotage efforts to make intercountry adoption a viable option for children in need of a family.

“This is what happens when you only impose overbearing regulations that make it increasingly difficult to facilitate intercountry adoption,” says NCFCA president and CEO Chuck Johnson.

It is past time for DOS to give a full and accurate accounting to Congress, the White House, and the American people for the failing results of their intercountry adoption policies. In addition, there has always been a willingness within the adoption community to work collaboratively with DOS to make the intercountry adoption process work better. “NCFCA hopes that the leadership at the Department of State will take responsibility for their role in contributing to this human rights disaster and reverse course immediately; otherwise, we can expect more of the same disastrous and deadly policies of the past 11 years,” Johnson states.

Countries of Note

While a major decline from China accounts for much of FY18’s downward adoption trend, many countries are also showing a similar trajectory. The following nations have been among the top 10 sending nations in the past two years and all have experienced declines since FY17 (noted in parenthesis): Democratic Republic of the Congo (-65%), Uganda (-53%), Ethiopia (-43%), South Korea (-25%), China (-23%), Haiti (-14%), and Bulgaria (-9%). The failure of DOS to bolster intercountry adoptions can be seen across continents and in countries large and small. Creating a solution to this issue will require widespread efforts — not simply working to repair relations with a few nations. There were a few notable areas of increased adoption, including the countries of Colombia and India.

Outgoing (Emigrating) Adoptions

Only 81 children emigrated for adoption from the United States in FY2018, a decline from the previous year. Last November, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services announced that there were more than 123,000 children waiting to be adopted out of foster care.⁴ The list of waiting children has risen to a nine-year high, putting increasing strain on America’s over-burdened child welfare system. Some of these children would be eligible for adoption outside the U.S. — an option that could open new opportunities for children in U.S. foster care who are waiting on a permanent family.

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ABOUT NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR ADOPTION

Founded in 1980, National Council For Adoption (NCFCA) is a global adoption advocacy nonprofit that promotes a culture of adoption through education, research, legislative action, and collaboration. As the authoritative voice for

² *Faith Int’l Adoptions v. Pompeo*, No. 2:18-cv-00731, 2018 WL 5619026 (W.D. Wash. Oct. 30, 2018)

³ <http://thefederalist.com/2016/11/02/obama-administration-make-international-adoption-lot-harder/>

⁴ <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/afcarsreport25.pdf>

adoption, NCFA's areas of focus include domestic infant adoption, adoption and permanency outcomes for youth in foster care, and intercountry adoption. Passionately committed to the belief that every child deserves to thrive in a nurturing, permanent family, NCFA serves children, birth parents, adopted individuals, adoptive families, and adoption professionals. In addition, we work tirelessly to educate U.S. and foreign government officials and policymakers, members of the media, and all those in the general public with an interest in adoption. For more information, visit www.AdoptionCouncil.org.