

- Name – Ricky Brisson
- Family circumstance – adoptive mother of two children – now aged 22 and 24 (from Colombia and Bolivia)
- Continued Involvement in intercountry adoption – 25 years, AFC (Australian Families for Children) , AICAN (Australian Intercountry Adoption Network) , ACC (Australians Caring for Children)
- AFC: is a member of AICAN, NSW Committee on Adoption and Permanent Care, NSW Family Services, Council of Social Service of New South Wales

I would like to take this opportunity of thanking members of the Standing Committee on Family and Human for bringing about this inquiry and hope that the results of the inquiry will bring about the much needed reform of the program.

In my submission I tried to address the terms of reference of this inquiry - regarding inconsistencies between states and the rights of intercountry adoptive families vs the rights of local adoptive families and biological families.

But if this inquiry is about listening to community concerns and addressing the issues and solving the problems being raised – then it must look beyond inconsistencies.

- Internationally close to 40,000 children are adopted each year
- Aican has been gathering statistics from a range of receiving countries which clearly demonstrates that Australian adopt far less children then other countries – the question is why?

When you hear about the large number of applicants waiting in each state – it is clear that it is not due to lack of willing families / and when you look at the international statistics it is clear that it is not due to lack of needing children.

The problem is in the way our system operates:

- The fragmented level and degree of government involvement / and the lack of government commitment (both state and federal)
 - 1) One federal central authority
 - 2) Eight state central authorities – with their own laws / policies – and conflicting interests (looking after children and families in their own state or helping children from other countries?)
 - 3) Bureaucratic attitude toward intercountry adoptions
 - 4) Degree of importance afforded to intercountry adoptions by government authorities (always bottom of the pile!)
 - 5) Lack of support and resources allocated to intercountry adoptions

- 6) Absence of documented protocols and procedures – specifically with regards to establishing new programs – with both convention and non-convention countries.
- The absence of NGOs involvement
 - 1) No accredited of NGOs – why?
 - 2) Lack of consultation with NGOs (notwithstanding the recommendations made by the Standing Committee on Treaties)
 - 3) Ignoring requests to invite Australian NGO representation to the Hague Special Commission meeting held this week (one of the main topics was accredited bodies)
 - 4) Lack of government support and funding for NGOs providing intercountry adoption services (pre or post)
 - 5) Mistrust of NGOs
 - 6) Perception that NGOs are purely self-interest organisation with no concern for the welfare of children

Establishing new program – with convention and non convention countries

Australian are allowed to adopt from a very limited number of countries
Historically – all programs in existence in Australia today have been either negotiated by NGOs or initiated by NGOs through personal interest or personal links.

The absence of NGOs is definitely affecting the development of the program

State welfare departments are not equipped to negotiate programs
No time / no resources / no expertise / no will / no sense of urgency

China – took 6 years to negotiate
In 2004
Around 100 children came Australia
7044 – to the USA
497 – to Sweden
308 – to Norway

BOLIVIA – prime example of bureaucracy at work!!