

The Committee

SUBJECT : SUBMISSION - ADOPTION OF CHILDREN FROM OVERSEAS

I refer to a media release on the parliamentary inquiry into the issue of children being adopted from overseas.

Intercountry Adoption is not only costly but more importantly a long drawn out process; the time frame to adopt a child can be anything from 2 to 5 years. We are constantly reminded that at all times 'the best interest of the child is paramount' how can this be the case when we are looking at a waiting period for adoptive parents of between 2 and 5 years, this not only causes emotional heartache to the adoptive parents but in no way can this benefit the waiting child, a child who is institutionalised, malnourished and needing a safe, loving home. The primary cause of this drawn out process is certainly not the unavailability of children but the bureaucracy and government red tape.

Whilst the Commonwealth Central Authority is responsible for Intercountry Adoptions, they have delegated their authority to the States, this has led to a maze of inconsistencies in areas of age criteria, costs, processing time, even in some states differences of countries where children can be adopted from, it is not unknown for prospective adoptive parents to move interstate for a faster, smoother and less restricting process.

Overseas adoption gives a couple the opportunity to become a family and gives the adoptive child the opportunity to live a happy life and a future they would never have the opportunity to receive.

It is estimated that in Africa alone there are some 12 million children orphaned by aids. In the USA between 1992 and 2000, intercountry adoptions to US families increased from 6,536 to 18,477, George W Bush called for all levels of government to keep supporting "these quiet heroes (adoptive parents)". In Australia the reverse seems to be happening despite being signatories to the Hague Convention, the numbers of adoptions have fallen over the past decade. In 1990-91, 393 overseas children were adopted; in 2000-2001 the figure was 289.

One of the big issues with adoptive parents apart from the long waiting game is the cost, they burn with anger at state bureaucracies that guard every angle, not allowing parents to directly contact orphanages or donor country governments and yet use every obstacle possible in the process.

Why are the Central Authorities not doing more to set up programs with other Hague countries? South Africa, Burundi, Guinea, Burkina Faso and Madagascar these five African countries alone are all Hague countries, South Africa has a very successful program with the USA,

From a personal point of view, we are hopeful of adopting a child from South Africa simply because of our personal involvement with several orphanages in South Africa which we visit on a regular basis, since making this decision we have been waiting now for 3 years, we first of all had to wait for Queensland to abolish the upper age criteria, we then had to wait for the Expressions of Interest to be opened, we submitted our Expression of Interest, we then had to wait for them to be closed, we have taken our first couple of steps, had our eligibility established but at this stage because we only have the one program in Africa and that is Ethiopia and under the Bilateral Agreement with Ethiopia we do not fit into the upper age criteria, we have to wait for a new program in Africa to open. We believe that in the best interest of the child, we should be doing more to encourage overseas adoption and set up new programs in other Hague countries to allow the needy children to have a loving and secure future.

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