

May 18, 2009

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United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED**RELEASED IN FULL****INFORMATION MEMO FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY JANICE JACOBS - CA****REVIEW AUTHORITY: Barbara Nielsen, Senior Reviewer**

FROM: CA – Michele T. Bond

SUBJECT: **Adoptions of Abandoned Children Halted by Ethiopian Court**

The Ethiopian First Instance Court has temporarily stopped accepting cases involving abandoned children referred by orphanages in Addis Ababa, citing a substantial increase in the number of abandoned children being brought for adoption in past months. Ethiopian authorities reported that as many as 150 children appear to have been abandoned in one neighborhood, and to have been found by the same police officer. Another neighborhood also contributed an unusually high number of abandoned children. The court has asked Addis Ababa police to investigate. Neither the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA) nor the First Instance Court is currently accepting any cases of abandonment children referred from any orphanages in Addis Ababa pending the investigation.

Five orphanages, all in Addis Ababa, are said to be linked to these abandonments. According to Embassy Addis Ababa, unconfirmed reports indicate two American-based agencies are associated with at least one of the orphanages under investigation. These agencies are Adoption Associates and All God's Children. Note that post does not have any information at this time that suggests any wrongdoing or unethical practices with either of these adoption agencies. Adoptions from Ethiopia have grown dramatically in recent years from fewer than 300 in FY2004 to more than 1,700 in FY2008. For the first six months of FY2009 they were slightly behind last year's pace, but on a par with adoptions from Russia.

The Office of Children's Issues has posted a notice about the suspension on adoption.state.gov. The Joint Council on International Children's Services, which recently proposed a voluntary Standards of Practices agreement among adoption service providers working in Ethiopia, has scheduled a conference call with its associates for May 18 to discuss the issue. Thus far, inquiries by prospective adoptive parents, adoption service providers and Congressional offices have been minimal.

Drafted by:CA/OCS/CI:RLincoln X6-9096 5-13-09

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