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DEPARTMENT FOR CA/OCS/CI

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TAGS: CVIS, CACS, CMGT, ET
SUBJECT: AS U.S. ADOPTIONS IN ETHIOPIA SHARPLY INCREASE, OFFICERS GO TO THE FIELD TO INCREASE OUTREACH TO GOE, AGENCIES

1. (U) SUMMARY: Ethiopian adoptions by American citizens nearly doubled in 2004 and significantly increased again in 2005, continuing the upward trend of the last several years. With an estimated 4 million orphans, Ethiopia is already the largest source of adoptions by American citizens in Africa, and one of the top ten worldwide, with numbers expected to rise further as more agencies are accredited. In contrast to one active U.S. agency in operating operation in Ethiopia in 2002, there are now six active U.S. agencies, with at least one more pending certification. An increasing demand caseload has led to greater post oversight scrutiny of the adoption process, in order to discourage malfeasance. The following is a summary of adoption procedures in Ethiopia, and post's concerns regarding current processes. END SUMMARY.

1. 2. (U) In 2005, Embassy Addis Ababa adjudicated 479 adoption visa cases, up from 306 in 2004. With the accreditation of at least two new agencies in 2005-2006, post expects to adjudicate more than 600 adoptions during FY2006. Adoptions in Ethiopia tend to be overwhelmingly IR4s, as the government does not require the family to travel to Ethiopia before the child's adoption is processed in the courts. Post expects this increase to continue, as the Ethiopian process is both streamlined and rapid for an international adoption. Anecdotally, post notes that we see several adoption cases per month transferred to Ethiopia from countries whose adoption programs, while larger, present greater difficulties and waiting times.

(U) In addition to the relative ease and speed to process adoptions in Ethiopia (adoptions for Americans tend to be overwhelmingly IR4s, as the government does not require the family to travel to Ethiopia before the child's adoption is processed in the courts), Ethiopia's growing popularity as an adoption source country may be because there is no due to

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Robert Strand, Senior Reviewer
a lack of designated minimum age at which a child can be adopted; the majority of adoptions processed at post are for infants. Average waiting time is roughly five weeks from the matching of a child to a family, to the time that parents depart Ethiopia with their adoptive child.

3. (U) Given the ease of processing, low fees, and skyrocketing interest among both Americans and Europeans, the possibility of adoption-related fraud is a major post concern. Adjudicating officers and adoption agency representatives, who are frequently debriefed by conoffs, are alert to the possibility that mothers may be giving up their children for monetary or perceived immigration-related rewards.

1. . However, the government is considering a rule that will require all children to remain in state custody for at least three months before being eligible for adoption. Post is closely monitoring the evolution of this rule as it may impact Ethiopia's popularity among adopting families.

SEPARATION vs. ABANDONMENT

4. (U) The majority of adoptive children have been abandoned by their mothers in places where it is assumed that they will be found and taken to local authorities. The application of U.S. law is particularly challenging when the child has been left with a friend or family member of the mother, and the mother subsequently disappears and cannot be found. In this case, it is not immediately clear that the mother intended that the child be given up for adoption, and all efforts must be made to locate the mother. In these situations, local officials typically place a notice in the local newspaper, conduct interviews and take statements in order to demonstrate "reasonable effort" to locate the parent. Ethiopian courts and social organizations show The Ministry of Social and Labor Affairs (MOLSA) reviews the actions taken by local officials before certifying that the child is available for adoption. Recently, post initiated spot-checks of cases that fit this model, sending our own seasoned fraud investigators to try to find the child's parents.

(U) As Ethiopia is one of the poorest countries in the world, fraud in the adoption process is always a concern, especially regarding infants. Post concern. Adjudicating officers, and we believe adoption agency representatives, who have are frequently been debriefed by ConOffs, are alert to the possibility that mothers may be giving up their children for monetary or perceived immigration-related rewards. The vast majority of cases in Ethiopia, however, involve children who were either abandoned or who lost both their parents. According to Ethiopian law, a child is declared abandoned by the courts when the mother is unknown or cannot be found after "reasonable efforts" are made to locate her. A very common situation is that an impoverished mother will abandon her
infant at a neighbor/family member's home, former workplace, or even designated "dropping areas" where children are known to be frequently abandoned. The local city administration police/local city administration will then attempt to locate the parents and/or any close family members who are willing to care for the child, and if none are found, will place the child in a local orphanage.

5. (U) Out of necessity, the local city administration, or (kebele), has a significant judgment role in cases of abandonment or even deceased parents. If, for example, a child has lost both parents, but death certificates are unavailable (a common occurrence in rural even in urban areas) the kebele will provide a finding that the parents are dead, using three local residents as official witnesses. If the mother disappears, it is the kebele's responsibility to make a decision that, after a three-month period, that the mother does not intend to return. Post can reports no problems in the decision-making process at the local level, which is closely scrutinized by both the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MOLSA) and Federal courts.

6. (U) The international adoption process involves a cooperative effort at the Ministry level with between MOLSA (the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs), the Federal Courts system, and the local social welfare authorities. When an American parent has intended to adopt an Ethiopian child in an orphanage represents a dossier to adopt an Ethiopian orphan, the Children and Youth Affairs Office of the Ethiopian Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MOLSA) MOLSA makes a final determination on the child's status as an orphan, as well as the parent's or parents' suitability to adopt. A statement from MOLSA recommending that the adoption be approved is then presented to the Regional Federal Court for a custody decision. (NOTE: MOLSA's responsibilities will soon be transferred to the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs, but the same personnel will direct the Office. END NOTE). Finally, the federal court decision is returned to MOLSA for final approval.

7. (U) Post is pleased with the cooperation we have it has received from MOLSA officials, who appear determined to maintain legitimacy in Ethiopian adoptions. When the Embassy Post has questions about the child's status, in for example, the circumstance where the parents are alive and well, - for example, in cases in which the parents are alive and well - is uncertain, M MOLSA has shared readily shares this information, as well as the reasoning rationale behind their decisions. Ethiopian officials appear determined to keep adoption in Ethiopia legitimate, and insists on proper documentation before a child is released to a non-Ethiopian family. Courts routinely approve MOLSA's determinations, and MOLSA is careful to follow up on post-placement evaluations for Ethiopian children adopted.
internationally.

8. (U) The Ethiopian authorities cautiously evaluate the social and economic status of adoptive parents during the process. MOLSA has unequivocally stated that adoptions by openly homosexual parents will not be approved, nor will by single men or anyone single women under the age of 25, although exceptions have been made to all of these rules. MOLSA's guidelines identify that a couple married for five years or more areas their preferred cases. All, and parents are required to submit a statement to MOLSA explaining their interest in adopting an Ethiopian child, and the measures that they will take to ensure the child's cultural ties to Ethiopia throughout his or her childhood.

9. (U) In an effort to maintain understanding of a fast-changing and changing issue, pPost has been proactive in reaching out to U.S. adoption agencies, holding regular quarterly meetings with all accredited U.S. agencies in Ethiopia. Special meetings are also held when high-level leadership of these agencies visit Ethiopia. Of the six U.S. adoption agencies accredited in Ethiopia, four were accredited in the past 18 months, making it vital that post maintain close and active communication with agencies and promote such communication among agencies. The increase in accredited agencies is — evidence of the growing interest in that Americans adopting in Ethiopia adoptions. Both U.S.- and Ethiopia-based representatives of these agencies have been astounded at the level of interest in Ethiopian adoptions by American clients, and many have noted their clients' happiness with the process, which they describe as thorough yet uncharacteristically timely (about 6 months from start to finish).

OFFICERS VISIT ADOPTION AGENCY FOSTER HOMES

ORPHANAGE FIELD VISITS

109. (U) All of the six American agencies accredited in Ethiopia maintain their own facility to house orphaned children. The children reside in these facilities, where until they are adopted, children reside as they are waiting to be adopted. On January 6, 2005, two American officers and two FSNs from the immv who is a unit Section visited the orphanage run by the Minnesota Children's Home Society (MCHS). This institution, who placed 107 children with American families in 2005. Embassy personnel visited the offices, the infant nursery, and a separate home which houses toddlers.

110. (U) MCHS physical premises are well maintained. Infants are housed four to a room, with a ratio of one nanny for every two children. They have three doctors and nine nurses on staff, and provide guest rooms for adoptive parents. Children stay with their adoptive parents during the
parents' entire stay in Ethiopia. The toddler house also has three to four children to a room. There are schoolrooms, playrooms, and a large yard. The officers arrived just in time to see the toddlers performing Christmas songs for adoptive parents. All of the children seemed clean, healthy, and happy.

11. MCHS outlined their procedure for receiving orphans. A child is only accepted by the Center when local officials have determined that the child is an orphan. All children with whom the MCHS works must be orphaned or abandoned under Ethiopian law. Orphaned children have certification from the Kebele (neighborhood government)(Kebele) that both parents are dead or incapable of caring for the child. The police???B?? bring all abandoned or orphaned children to the agency; lay people may not bring an abandoned child in for adoption. No lay person can bring an abandoned child to the agency. The police???B?? report of abandonment is placed in the child's file. After a child is accepted by the Center, a thorough medical evaluation is performed. Any known relatives are photographed with the child for the file, and a family history is completed. MCHS has agreed to make any of their records available to the Embassy upon request. Like many local agencies,

12. MCHS is also involved in a sponsorship program, helping the poorest children in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Region of (SNNPR) in largely-destitute southern Ethiopia. Many adoptive families become sponsors, although this is not a requirement for adoption. MCHS also runs a school to training students in primary health care, and is financing the construction of a new orphanage in southern Ethiopia.

123. On February 10, 2006, an Conofficer also visited

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