

RELEASED IN PART B5,B6

090609 Concerns about abandonment cases

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Barbara Nielsen, Senior Reviewer

The Problem

- Post is seeing an increasing number of adoption cases (*how many? What magnitude of increase?*) in which the child is said to be abandoned.
- When asked to provide additional details about the child's origin, the agency generally has no additional information (*is this true of all agencies? Are some much better than others? What do the good ones say?*). They say the information they have is limited to what orphanages give them, which is very little.
- Agencies appear to have little confidence that the info they have on the child is reliable (*is this generally true? Do some agencies appear to be confident? Which ones?*). They doubt it is true. They assume the orphanages may be obtaining children through unethical means.
- Agencies appear to have no incentive to confirm with any degree of confidence where the child came from and under what circumstances (*is this generally true? Are there exceptions?*). Agencies are client driven. They have a demand for adoptable orphans. The agencies go to whatever orphanages have adoptable orphans, ask few questions, and accept whatever documentation and information the orphanage provides them. (*or is the problem limited to only some agencies? Or some orphanages?*)
- Agencies do not appear to feel responsible for clarifying and confirming the origin of children. They don't feel it is their responsibility. They think it is the responsibility of the Government of Ethiopia (*which it is*) and/or of the Embassy (*which it also is*).

It is probably unrealistic to expect agencies to take responsibility for confirming the origin of children. There is an obvious conflict of interest. However, are there things we can demand of agencies that will improve our confidence that the cases they bring us are legitimate?

Our Options

-
-
-
-
-
-
-

B5

Discussion

1. Consular officers said they are seeing a growing number of cases of abandoned children. Generally agency reps have little information about these cases.
2. While some agencies have better trained and more professional local staffs, those agencies don't generally know any more about such cases than do those agencies with less well trained and less professional staffs.

3.

B5

4. We agreed to focus our attention on those categories of cases that concern us the most and to find ways to either improve our confidence with such cases or reduce the number of them. Such cases, after all, have the potential to threaten the survival of the intercountry adoption program in Ethiopia.
5. We identified three categories of cases that concern us the most. They are:
 - Abandoned children who are more than one year old. Experienced police officers tell us that it is very rare for police to find children older than a year.
 - Abandoned and found by police. This category has grown considerably. There is very little accountability associated with these cases, compared with for instance, relinquishments where there is normally a court procedure where someone, usually a mother or grandmother says to a judge that she is relinquishing the child
 - Children relinquished by an uncle or other relative other than the mother or grandmother.

For these types of cases, we will inform the agencies that for these categories we want to see and have a chance to review the case well before the court date. We will then have a chance to ask questions of the agency, request additional documentation, and seek greater clarity from the agency and other involved parties as to the circumstances under which the child became available for adoption. [Paul will draft such a message and send to all agencies AFTER we have our June 25 meeting.] It was agreed that we don't want to distract attention away from the focus of the June 25 meeting (preliminary TB screening of orphans).

6. We identified two agencies that give us the most concerns: Hope and Better Futures. We have already notified Hope's U.S. office that we want to review ALL of their cases well before the court date. We need to send the same message to their Ethiopian headquarters. We need to send a similar notice to Better Futures – both its Ethiopian and U.S. offices. [Paul will draft such a message. Scott will provide Paul with the contact information for Hope's Ethiopian office and of the Ethiopian and U.S. offices of Better Futures.]
7. It was suggested that we consider meeting with the governmental authority that oversees/supervises orphanages to get a better idea of what their guidelines are for accepting children, keeping records, etc. We agreed to explore the possibility of such a meeting.