

Joint Council Meeting

4 February 2008

RELEASED IN FULL**Representation from:**

- JCICS
- U.S. Embassy
- Holt
- Hawaii (not registered here)
- Christian World Adoptions
- Wide Horizons
- FTIA (not registered here)
- Children's Home Society
- Dove
- Americans for African Adoption
- Adoption Advocates International
- WACAP (not registered here)
- Adoption Avenues

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Barbara Nielsen, Senior Reviewer**Notes:**

- There are 56 members of the Adoption Network in Ethiopia, including agencies that send children to the U.S. and Europe
- About eleven of the twenty-five U.S. agencies in Ethiopia are members
- The JCICS has been around for thirty years
- Primary concern is the right of children to have loving families
- JCICS deals with family preservation, foster programs, group homes, and domestic/intl adoption
 - International adoption should be the last resort
- JCICS has member organizations in 54 countries
- JCICS estimates that the current halt on adoptions in Guatemala will not be resolved for five or more years
- There is a large amount of focus on the professionalism of child welfare workers
- JCICS is concerned with the huge influx of adoption cases in Ethiopia
 - Agencies need to recognize the difference between U.S. law and Ethiopian law, as related to adoption
 - Agencies need to make sure their local staff are properly trained on U.S. immigration law
- There must never be any sort of financial benefit to birth families as a result of adoption
 - No money for the birth family
 - No goods
 - Any exchange of money or goods that creates an incentive for a birth family to give up a child "cannot be conducted"
- No organization should ever send people out into the field to search for children for international adoption

- “Birth families should come looking for you. You should never go looking for them.”
 - As far as the JCICS knows, this practice is not happening in Ethiopia at this time.
- “Financial support of birth families is a problem, and we can’t be doing that.”
- Instead of direct financial support of birth families, JCICS encourages community development projects like schools or hospitals.
- A 100% acceptance rate of children at an agency is indicative of a problem.
 - Over 85% of families who bring kids to WHFC end up taking their kids back.
- The adoption process in Ethiopia must be done ethically from start to finish.
 - No agency should ever encourage the relinquishment of a child, nor should agencies be involved in any way in the relinquishment process.
 - The GOE should be more heavily involved in the adoption process.
 - The best interest of one child does not trump the law, because this could jeopardize the situation for all Ethiopian orphans.
- Agencies should never pay for referrals of specific children from any orphanage.
- MOWA prefers that orphanages be supported with projects instead of money.
- There should be some type of counseling available for birth families.
- The FFIC should typically only be accepting two-parent relinquishment cases if the parents are completely destitute or are terminally ill.
- One recent case of adoption fraud has landed a birth father and an adoption agent in jail for six months.
 - Both parents were HIV+ and left their child at an orphanage, believing they didn’t have long to live.
 - The mother started to feel better, and she tried to go retrieve the child.
 - The father had already taken the child to the courts, and he said that the mother was missing.
- It is the agencies’ responsibility to know how children ended up in institutionalized care.
 - Vietnam is shutting down because agencies did not bother to know how kids ended up in orphanages.
 - This was also the problem in Guatemala; there was no interface between the birth mothers and the point of relinquishment.
- There must be accountability and transparency in the Ethiopian adoption program.
- Adoption agencies in the U.S. and in other countries compete constantly with each other. The Adoption Network in Ethiopia is unique because the agencies here decided amongst themselves to form a collaborative network without any suggestion from outside parties.
 - Ethiopia is the only country in the world with the initiative to form a network like that. No other country has anything like it.
- Agencies should never use contractors, only direct staff hires.
 - No one working for any agency should ever be paid on a per-case basis.
 - Volunteers should never be in management positions.

- JCICS is planning to open a permanent office in Ethiopia, and representatives will return to Addis in May 2008.
- JCICS is developing Standards of Practice for Ethiopia, based on the SOP they developed for Vietnam.
- Agencies in Ethiopia should promote domestic adoption.
 - A fund could be created by participating agencies and it could be used to develop domestic adoption programs.
 - Ethiopia has a long tradition of adoption, just not of children unrelated to the adopting parents.
 - MOWA is trying to create a special legal structure for adoption of blood relatives.
- A lot of adoptive families only want babies, and this can be a problem for the agencies here.
 - If any agency employee is ever pressured to find babies, the JCICS should be contacted immediately.
- A central registry should be created for kids with special needs.
- Families adopting older/special needs kids need to be educated on this.
- MOWA is currently working on shutting down two agencies in Ethiopia [non-American as far as I know] because of their practices.
- JCICS wants to set up a listserv for all the agencies in Ethiopia.