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SUBJECT: JOINT COUNCIL URGES CHANGE, OFFERS RESOURCES FOR CAPACITY  
 BUILDING

REF: (A) Addis Ababa 1764 (B) Addis Ababa 1894

1. (U) SUMMARY. In a series of meetings in Addis Ababa July 6 - 12, Tom DiFilipo, CEO of the Joint Council for International Children's Services (JCICS) urged the Government of Ethiopia (GoE) to consider adopting Standards of Practice, while offering a financial support package to assist the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA) in capacity building. In separate meetings with adoption agencies, DiFilipo urged agencies to commit to the Standards of Practice and to voluntarily cap the numbers of adoptions they process while the GoE builds capacity. END SUMMARY

2. (U) DiFilipo's activities came during a week when the GoE was considering temporarily suspending all intercountry adoptions until it could build capacity to adequately deal with the growing number of cases. In an inter-ministerial meeting July 9 the GoE decided not to suspend adoptions (Ref B). This cable provides details of the JCICS' proposals and describes issues covered in JCICS' meetings with Ethiopian officials, adoption agencies, and consular staff of other foreign missions.

3. (U) The rapid rise in the number of adoptions processed in the last two years and the growth in number of adoptions agencies has put an enormous strain on governmental agencies responsible for adoptions. In meetings with the ministries of Justice, Foreign Affairs, and Women's Affairs, DiFilipo argued that suspension of intercountry adoptions, even if intended to be temporary, often results in a country remaining closed to intercountry adoptions for years, a situation that could be devastating for both orphaned children and for social services in Ethiopia. DiFilipo argued that if adoptions were to be closed down and the agencies removed, an enormous amount of capacity-building and community-support funding

**REVIEW AUTHORITY: Robert Strand, Senior Reviewer**

would be lost.

4. (SBU) In his meetings with Ethiopian authorities, DiFilippo said authorities often referred to unethical practices in the intercountry adoption process as "legal child trafficking," an expression he said is often used by UNICEF and Save the Children UK to describe intercountry adoptions. Both organizations, according to DiFilippo, have institutional biases against intercountry adoptions. DiFilippo said Ethiopian authorities told him both organizations had come forward recently with allegations of child-selling in Ethiopia. He said Ethiopian authorities told him such allegations are an affront to Ethiopia's national pride and could damage the government's human rights record.

5. (U) The JCICS addressed the need for capacity building both in its recommendations to the GoE, which focus on better monitoring, and in a proposal to assist the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA) with funding. The JCICS, in coordination with a group of adoption agencies known as the Adoption Network, has formulated a proposal to provide assistance to MOWA for capacity building in the form of a grant of USD 220,000. This funding would support establishing four additional staff positions, purchase of computers, and support for training and transportation. Funds would be sourced through voluntary contributions from adoption agencies and would flow through the JCICS so that no agency's specific contribution would be known to MOWA. The JCICS also plans to raise funds from other sources. The JCICS expects funds to be available by the end of the summer.

6. (U) DiFilippo reported the MFA also expressed interest in building capacity by charging a processing fee for each case reviewed by MOWA. Currently, MOWA charges no fees. The JCICS, among others including post, has urged the GoE to consider charging a fee as a means of funding needed capacity building. However, implementing such a fee would likely require a lengthy parliamentary approval process. As an alternative, the JCICS has proposed that agencies add a flat-rate "MOWA Processing Fee" to the existing fees they charge adoptive families, and funnel that money through JCICS to MOWA.

7. (U) Among its recommendations to agencies, the JCICS suggested that all agencies consider voluntarily capping their numbers of cases while the GoE builds capacity to handle the adoptions caseload. In his meetings with agencies, DiFilippo suggested that adoption agencies shift their focus from adoption to child welfare, and that they begin to refer to themselves as "child welfare NGOs" instead of "adoption agencies." The difference is more than semantic and is in line with the GoE's plans to recast the mandate for agencies (REF B). While some adoption agencies focus primarily on placing children for intercountry adoption, the GoE wants agencies to refocus their efforts. It plans to license for intercountry adoption only agencies that fill the broader role of child welfare NGOs.

8. (U) According to Ethiopian authorities, these child welfare NGOs would be expected to provide intercountry adoption services as part of a broader range of social services, including family

preservation, public outreach and education, domestic adoption and fostering programs, and child protective services. Intercountry

adoption would account for only a small part of any organization's larger program. DiFilipo explained in his meetings with agencies that child welfare NGOs should provide services, not aid, and should be willing to collaborate with other agencies in a non-competitive environment. He suggested inter-country adoption should be the second-to-last option for children, after family preservation and domestic adoption, but before permanent institutionalization.

9. (U) In the inter-ministerial meeting July 9, Ethiopian authorities agreed to a multi-part plan to strengthen control and monitoring of the intercountry adoption process (REF B). As part of that plan, authorities are evaluating all adoption agencies active in Ethiopia to determine which agencies provide capacity-building and family services and which only offer inter-country adoption services. Those in the latter category may have their licenses terminated within six months. The JCICS suggested to the GOE that the number of agencies in Ethiopia be reduced by at least half, starting with all non-Hague-accredited agencies. It recommended that the GoE revoke the licenses of all non-Hague-accredited agencies operating in Ethiopia. This would reduce the number of licensed U.S. agencies to fewer than 20. JCICS plans to remove all non-Hague agencies from JCICS membership by September. Currently, of the 24 U.S. agencies licensed to operate in Ethiopia, 13 are Hague-accredited, two have temporary Hague accreditation until 2010, seven are non-accredited, and two were denied Hague accreditation.

10. (U) Currently there are more than 70 agencies licensed in Ethiopia that are referring children for intercountry adoption. The number of U.S. agencies (24) alone has more than tripled since 2005.

The number of children post processed yearly for IR3 and IR4 visas has grown from 479 in FY2005 to 758 in FY2006 to 1,301 in FY2007. Post expects to process nearly 2,000 by the end of FY2008. The Spanish, French, and Italian missions in Addis, which account for the second, third, and fourth largest number of intercountry adoption visas after the U.S., report similar increases in recent years. Spain processed 487 cases in 2007, and has reported a sharp increase in the number of Spanish agencies operating in Ethiopia. The French Embassy reported processing 417 orphan visas in 2007, and had already processed 220 cases by April 2008. The Italian Embassy reported an increase of more than 100 percent in orphan visas between 2006 and 2007, from 100 cases in 2006 to more than 200 in 2007. The Italians expect to process more than 400 cases in 2008.

11. (SBU) In a meeting hosted by conoff July 10, DiFilipo reached out to consular officers from the Italian, French, and Spanish embassies for help in attracting adoption agencies from their respective countries to join the Adoptions Network, to attend JCICS' meetings, and to become part of a unified community of agencies committed to improving the intercountry adoptions process. The Italian, French, and Spanish consuls all shared post's and JCICS's concern that recent revelations of unethical and possibly illegal

practices threaten the survival of Ethiopia's intercountry adoptions program. But while they acknowledged the need for the GoE to improve its control and monitoring of the process and of MOWA to build capacity, they were noncommittal about encouraging agencies to join the Adoptions Network or to adopt the JCICS' Standards of Practice. Post plans further meetings with Italian, French, and Spanish consular officers and will explore ways to include them in posts' efforts to improve the intercountry adoptions process in Ethiopia.

12. (U) The Standards of Practice, which the JCICS submitted to the GoE, are based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation with Respect to Inter-country Adoptions (Hague). The JCICS's Standards of Practice include recommendations for both the GoE and for agencies. For agencies, they set requirements for agencies' financial accountability and transparency, for the accountability of agencies' in-country staff, for inter-agency collaboration, for contact with birth parents, for conflict resolution, and for the regulation and standardization of orphanage and agency intake procedures. The Standards of Practice are based on a similar document presented by the JCICS to the Government of Vietnam in early 2008.

13. (U) The explosion in the number of agencies and in the volume of cases processed has caused a great deal of concern - shared by post, the JCICS and the GoE - both about the ways in which children come into care and the professionalism of locally-engaged staffs of adoption agencies. The JCICS has expressed concern over orphanages having agreements with agencies that involve money being paid on a per-child basis, similar to practices that were a problem in Vietnamese orphanages. The JCICS recommends that each orphanage make an agreement with only one agency, and that agencies should not offer aid in any form to any orphanage with which they have a contract. The JCICS may suggest establishment of a DNA database of all adopted children in order to be able to identify them in cases where birth parents claim to have been tricked into relinquishing their children.

14. (U) The JCICS has heard allegations that some agencies in Ethiopia pay their local staff on a per-child basis - a practice that creates an incentive for local staff to encourage birth families to relinquish their children. The Standards of Practice forbids such a practice. The JCICS recommended more comprehensive training for all locally-engaged agency staff and for all employees of orphanages involved in intercountry adoption. It also recommended better documentation of orphanage intake procedures, more comprehensive birth family counseling before relinquishment. The JCICS recommended that orphanages and/or agencies offer short-term financial assistance, medical assistance, and job training in order to get birth families to reconsider relinquishment. The Standards of Practice emphasize that birth families should have a full understanding of what intercountry adoption is, and be made aware of all the alternatives to relinquishing a child.

15. (U) Finally, the JCICS asked agencies to exercise care to avoid unnecessarily calling attention to the large number of Ethiopian adopted children. Ethiopian public opinion is sensitive to and not altogether supportive of the concept of intercountry adoption. Because adoptive families tend to travel to Ethiopia in groups, they often attract attention. Ethiopians worry that their children have become the country's number-one "export." On average, about 75 children adopted by foreigners depart Ethiopia each week. To travelers at Addis' Bole International Airport, it appears as if Ethiopian babies are leaving by the planeload. Because of negative local perception of intercountry adoption, some agencies no longer permit adoptive parents to take their children out in public. The JCICS encourages this practice, and has suggested that adoptive parents stay at small guesthouses instead of large chain hotels, in order to avoid the image of "baby hotels." DiFilipo plans to return to Ethiopia in September to establish a permanent JCICS office.

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