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## Notes on Meeting with European Consuls – 10/29/08

Focus of the meeting was on Adoptions

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Barbara Nielsen, Senior Reviewer

Participant countries:

- France, Italy, Spain, Netherlands, Poland, Austria, Germany, Romania, United States, Czech Republic, Finland, Norway, Denmark, Ireland

Shared statistics:

- **France:** has already completed 425 adoptions in 2008 and estimates a total of 500 for the year. Up 20% from last year. They are working on revoking the adoptions for the two children who were molested by adoptive parents in France earlier this year. Final status of the children is unknown at this point.
- **Italy:** has already completed 270 adoptions in 2008 and estimates a total of 320 for the year. Up 20% from last year.

Presentation:

There was a presentation by Dr. Alessandro Conticini from the NGO Play Therapy Africa. Dr. Conticini has been working with orphanages and children's issues in Ethiopia for several years. He expressed concern at many of the same issues that we have had – namely:

- Conflict between the Ministry of Justice (Federal First Instance Court) and the Ministry of Women's Affairs has led to shoddy record-keeping and no clear agency in charge.
- There are no minimum standards for child-care institutions in Ethiopia.
- Post-adoption reviews by MOWA are more-or-less useless because officials are going on a free trip to a nice country, rather than looking at underlying problems in the Ethiopian structure that causes so many children to need intercountry adoption.
- In such a poor country, the obvious money that washes through agencies is a draw for unscrupulous actors.
- Claims there are people who are in the country trying to convince poor parents to give up children.
- Unlicensed agencies are umbrella-ing under licensed agencies.

Dr. Conticini recommends:

- An accreditation system for all agencies and orphanages. Supports Hague convention ratification.
- All agencies and orphanages should be reviewed by an independent body.
- Parents should spend more time in Ethiopia with their children prior to departure.

My comments:

- Summarized what MFA told us about three committee review of adoptions. The Italians confirmed that the MFA told them the same thing.
- Mentioned that having parents stay in Ethiopia longer is a non-starter, as the GoE has told us that white adoptive parents need to keep a low profile. The Dutch confirmed that their agencies have been told the same thing.

Other comments:

- Many consuls agreed with Dr. Contini's first two recommendations and stated that adoptions should be overseen by only one GoE entity.
- The French Ambassador wants to talk to GoE entities (unclear which at this point) about adoptions. They're going to come up with some points and clear them with us, the Spanish and Italians. There's a new Spanish consul who seems much more open to working with us about adoptions. The Italian consul seemed more open to working with everyone on adoptions than before. I'm hopeful that we can get better U.S.-French-Spanish-Italian cooperation on adoptions.

Non-adoption related consular issues:

- Italians complained about GoE not informing them of arrested citizens.
- French worried about their tourists stubbornly continuing to go to the Danakil region despite GoF warnings against.
- Dutch say they've had increased reports of petty crime against their citizens, possibly linked to the worsening economic situation.
- French have implemented 10-print biometrics, the first Schengen state to do so. All Schengen countries should be 10-printing here by July 2009.