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Sent: Monday, April 25, 2011 2:05 PM
To: Lord, Peter W; Hartwig, Edward J; Justice, Skye S; Whitt, Lester E; Mushingi, Tulinabo S; Bell, Esther F; Rupp, Abigail M; Parker, Christine D; Malone, Lee O; Fitzpatrick, Agata D; Hammitt, Louise A
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Subject: Unethical Recruitment, Orphanage Closures, and Reduced Processing Provide Bleak Outlook on Ethiopian Adoptions
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Subject: Unethical Recruitment, Orphanage Closures, and Reduced Processing Provide Bleak Outlook on Ethiopian Adoptions

Summary

1. (SBU) The state of adoptions in Ethiopia has never been more fragile. Evidence obtained during 32 birth mother interviews conducted by consular staff in March 2011 and a field investigation into the practices of two adoption service providers (ASPs) and their partner orphanages concludes that an increasing number of agencies are employing orphanages to unethically recruit children into inter-country adoption (ICA). When coupled with the Government of Ethiopia's (GOE) decision to significantly reduce adoption processing by 60 to 90 percent and the pending closure of six orphanages in southern Ethiopia with ties to 17 U.S. ASPs, the way forward is increasingly unclear. End Summary.

Latest on GOE Reduction in Processing

2. (SBU) On April 1, 2011, Ambassador Booth met with Ministry of Women's, Children's, and Youth Affairs (MOWCYA) State Minister Almaw Mengistu to discuss the GOE's public letter outlining their intent to reduce adoptions by 90 percent. On multiple occasions during the meeting, State Minister Mengistu highlighted that these measures were

being put in place to reduce international adoptions and focus on finding family-based solutions for orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) within Ethiopia. (Comment: These remarks were not in line with MOWCYA's previously stated objective of improving the due diligence of the adoption cases it is processing, and likely indicate the real reason behind the slowdown.) State Minister Mengistu indicated that the Ministry created a task force to clear out cases with a court summons prior to March 8, 2011, and that this work would be finished within 15 business days (around the end of April). He confirmed that the Ministry plans to significantly reduce the number of new cases (cases with a court summons after March 8, 2011) processed each day, but would not clarify the exact number. Mengistu also asked for international donor assistance to build capacity and increase OVC programs. Ambassador Booth provided the State Minister information on USAID's recently announced \$92 million program to assist OVCs in Ethiopia.

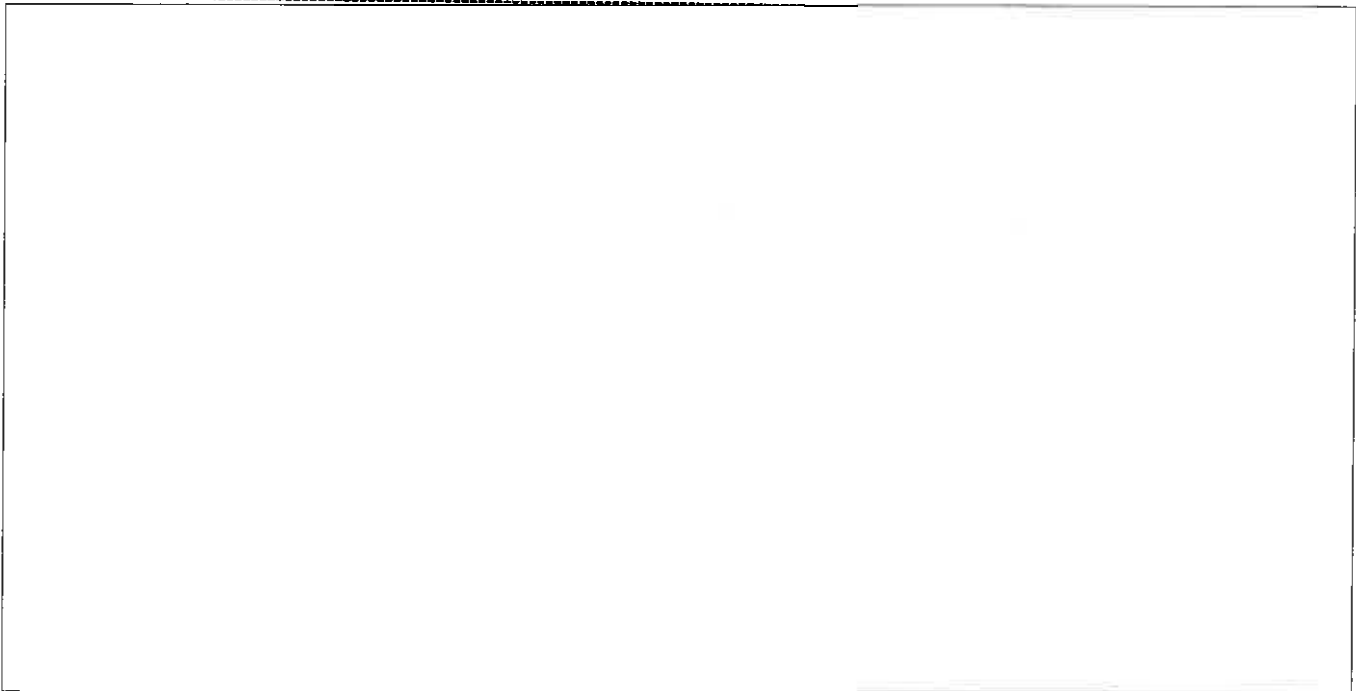
3. (SBU) At an informal adoption working group meeting on April 19, 2011 with UNICEF and other receiving countries, both UNICEF and French colleagues confirmed that in their recent dialogue with MOWCYA the Ministry did not hold firm on the decision to process only five cases a day. UNICEF is hopeful that the Ministry will process between 15 and 20 cases a day, while the French are less optimistic. Given that the GOE will soon complete processing of all pre-March 8 casework, we believe that by the end of May we should have a clear idea of MOWCYA's intended processing level. (Comment: Even under a best case scenario of the GOE processing 15-20 cases per day, the adoption portfolio would be reduced by 60 percent.)

GOE to Shut Down Nine Orphanages in Southern Ethiopia

4. (SBU) Embassy officials have obtained information from a reliable source outlining the GOE's plan to close nine orphanages in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region due to the failure for these institutions to adhere to the guidelines of care outlined by the regional government. Two of these orphanages are among the top five sending orphanages in the U.S. adoption process. Six of these orphanages have partnerships with 17 U.S.-based adoption service providers. Since June 2009, the U.S. Embassy has issued more than 1190 immigrant visas to orphaned children from these soon to be closed facilities, approximately 32 percent of the entire number of children who have immigrated to the United States through adoption over the last two years. The GOE is working with UNICEF to create a plan for the estimated 600 children currently in these facilities, which would likely include a de-institutionalization effort aimed at finding alternative child care solutions or returning some children to their birth families. We do not know if any of the affected children have already been matched with U.S. adoptive parents.

B6
B7(C)
B7(E)

Increased Scrutiny Highlights Unethical Recruitment, Lack of Due Diligence



[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

9. (SBU) The Blessing the Children orphanage also runs a women's empowerment program that provides local workB6 cash grants to start a small business. So far, Blessing the Children has assisted 25 women through this program in B7(A) Kamashi town. Of the 25, at least 15 women had relinquished children for inter-country adoption to the Blessing tB7(C) Children orphanage. An orphanage social worker denied the program provides an incentive to women to relinquish their children and claimed that the orphanage has no role in selecting the women for this program. Embassy has reported this information to the GOE via diplomatic note and will also forward to Department for transmission to the Hague Council on Accreditation.

10. (SBU) Embassy staff attended a meeting organized by the Sidama Zone Finance and Economic Development Bureau in Awassa from March 25-27, 2011. Local GOE officials reported that they recently investigated orphanages in the area and found a number of irregularities on which they planned to take action. These concerns included agreements between ASPs and orphanages for the sole purpose of delivering children into ICA, limited family-based development programs, and funding mechanisms between ASPs and orphanages that pay these facilities on a per child basis. Zonal officials also expressed their unease over the integrity of orphanages that employ local government officials and/or quickly funnel children to transition homes in Addis Ababa.

11. (SBU) Recent Embassy fraud investigations in Awassa confirm many of the issues raised by zonal authorities. A January 2011 visit to the Shalom Orphanage, which works with Bethany International and America World, concluded that the orphanage employed a local GOE official to assist birth families willing to relinquish children to the orphanage. Five relinquishing birth parents in Borecha Woreda confirmed to Embassy personnel that this official directed them through the relinquishment process. In two of these cases, the relinquishing families stated that the official told them

that the Shalom orphanage would provide a financial reward to the birth family after the completion of the adoption. One of the families indicated that they believed the purpose of our visit was to provide them with this financial reward. In a diplomatic note dated January 25, 2011, the Embassy informed the GOE that the USG finds unethical the practice of a government employee coercing and offering financial incentives to birth families to relinquish a child. The Shalom orphanage is not among those scheduled to close, according to the document obtained by Embassy personnel.

12. (SBU) Initiative Ethiopia, another orphanage in Awassa not targeted for closure, has been subject to two site visits by Embassy staff following receipt of adverse information from a reliable source. After our January visit to this orphanage, which raised serious concerns about their due diligence and financing, we understand that Gladney International, the only ASP working with the orphanage, ceased their financial support of the facility. In March, the director of the orphanage indicated to Embassy staff that an internal investigation into the case files of 35 children at their facility revealed that 28 had false information included in their case histories. All were documented as orphans with deceased parents, but when orphanage officials attempted to verify those facts they discovered that the children actually had two living parents. The orphanage is now negotiating with the parents to return the children to their birth families.

Comment: Adoptions at a Turning Point

13. (SBU) There have been a number of recent turbulent events in the adoption portfolio. The GOE reduction in processing, coupled with their plan to close a number of large source orphanages indicates a growing GOE desire to address abuse of the process and focus on alternative care solutions for orphans and vulnerable children. Key officials within the GOE have expressed a negative view of ICA, and we would not be surprised to see more restrictive or punitive measures taken against ASPs, especially given our own recent reporting. Our findings of coercion, unethical recruitment, and mismanagement by orphanages and ASPs, clearly show that despite significant outreach on our and the Department's part, ASPs are still not pulling their weight in adding due diligence to their process at the local level. The future of adoptions in Ethiopia is growing more and more tenuous. End Comment.

Signature: BOOTH

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