

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Robert Strand, Senior Reviewer

EMBASSY OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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No. 11- 979

The Embassy of the United States of America presents its compliments to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and has the honor to forward the following information to the Women's Affairs Directorate General of the Ministry, the Ethiopian Ministry of Women's, Children's and Youth Affairs, Federal First Instance Court of Ethiopia, and Ethiopian Charities and Societies Agency. The Embassy wishes to present information regarding Initiative Ethiopia orphanage's unethical recruitment of children for the purpose of inter-country adoption.

In May and June 2011, Embassy staff conducted field investigations into the activities of Initiative Ethiopia orphanage both in Awassa and Addis Ababa. Information obtained during this investigation indicates that the orphanage director,

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[redacted] in cooperation with local officials, recruited children for placement in the Initiative Ethiopia orphanage outside of normal customary and legal channels.

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During our visit to the Initiative Ethiopia orphanage in Awassa, Mr. [redacted] was unable to provide documentation for any of the 33 children currently in the facility's custody because he stated that the documentation was kept at the orphanage's office in Addis Ababa. However, on a subsequent visit to the Addis Ababa office [redacted] was still unable to produce any documentation for any child in the orphanage's custody. We are concerned because the inability to produce case files or documentation for any child legally in Initiative Ethiopia's custody may indicate that the orphanage is accepting children without confirmation that they are orphans.

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Our investigation uncovered that 27 out of 33 children currently in the custody of the Initiative Ethiopia orphanage in

Awassa were placed into that facility's care based on fraudulent or suspected fraudulent information, and only six were found to have documentation accurately reflecting their history. Embassy personnel have worked closely with the Gladney Center for Adoption, one agency that has worked extensively with the Initiative Ethiopia orphanage, to independently investigate and confirm the true status of these children.

According to the original documents provided by Initiative Ethiopia to the Gladney Center, 20 children were relinquished by a family member after both of their biological parents died. However, an investigation by Gladney Center staff later confirmed that 14 of the 20 children actually had living parents. The remaining six cases are still under investigation by the Gladney Center and the U.S. Embassy.

Another four children were purportedly relinquished by a parent after the other parent died. Gladney Center staff has

confirmed in one case that the deceased parent is alive, and the other three cases are still under investigation.

Two children were allegedly brought to Initiative Ethiopia orphanage by police and documented as "abandoned". Independent investigation by Gladney Center staff and the U.S. Embassy has confirmed that both children have at least one known living parent.

For the remaining child the orphanage has yet to provide any documentation regarding status as an orphan. The Embassy is concerned regarding the lack of documentation in these cases, and over the errors and fabrications inherent in the documentation already seen. We have enclosed a more detailed analysis of these cases for your review.

During our investigation, U.S. Embassy staff spoke to staff members at Initiative Ethiopia, relinquishing family members, and government employees at the woreda and kebele levels. Multiple

sources indicate that the Gorche woreda official, reportedly a personal friend of Mr. [REDACTED] directed kebele offices to search for children whose biological parents had died and encourage those families to relinquish children into the care of Initiative Ethiopia. As a result of this directive, Mr. Hailu Joel, head of the Administrative Office of Gorche woreda, reportedly announced the request for relinquishment of children in the Murancho Gorche kebele. We note that 14 children currently in Initiative Ethiopia's custody are from Gorche woreda. The Embassy is concerned that the alleged personal relationship between Mr. [REDACTED] and Gorche woreda officials may have led to active recruitment of children into Initiative Ethiopia's care for placement in inter-country adoption.

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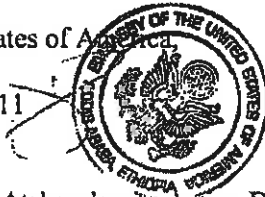
The Gladney Center has informed the U.S. Embassy that it is already working to find solutions for the children known to be falsely documented, including returning children to their biological families when possible and exploring domestic care alternatives to international adoption.

The Embassy respectfully requests that the Government provides any additional information they might have about the unethical recruitment of children into inter-country adoption through Initiative Ethiopia orphanage.

The Embassy of the United States of America avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia the assurances of its highest consideration.

Embassy of the United States of America

Addis Ababa, June 21, 2011



cc: Ambassador Taye Atskeslassie, Acting Director General for American Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Ambassador Halima Mohammed, Director General of Women's Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

H.E. W/o Zenebu Tadesse, Minister of the Women, Children and Youth Affairs Ministry

W/o Yayesh Tesfahuney, Director of Children's Right Promotion and Protection Directorate, Ministry of Women and Youth Affairs

Ato Ali Siraj, Director of Charities, Societies Agency

Desalegn Berhe, President, Federal First Instance Court of Ethiopia

Judge Rahila Abbas, Federal First Instance Court of Ethiopia