

## Joint Council on International Children's Services

Joint Council is a donor-supported non-profit advocacy organization with a mission to advance the overall well-being of vulnerable children and their right to live in permanent family care. In order to fulfill our mission we educate governments, charities, social service and medical professionals and all those who serve, on how best to strengthen families, prevent abandonment, place children into permanent family life, care for our children and build productive, peaceful societies. We create coalitions of the like-minded., identify and foster new ideas, new approaches and new leadership. We marshal existing and new resources in service to the forgotten children living in adversity. Learn more at [jointcouncil.org](http://jointcouncil.org)

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The Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism at Brandeis University has chosen to include Joint Council's comments on their webpage titled *U.S. Adoption Agencies Respond to FOIA'ed Documents*. It should be noted that while Joint Council's comments are included under this heading and many adoption service providers are strong Partners with Joint Council, as noted above Joint Council is not an adoption service provider.

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### FOIA Document: Joint Council Urges Change, Offers Resources for Capacity Building

#### Item #4

The reference to UNICEF and Save The Children in relation to their perceived opposition to intercountry adoption was based on the environment that existed in 2008, specific to Ethiopia and other countries in which Joint Council worked directly with host governments, civil society, and other stakeholders. In the seven subsequent years, the environment has changed significantly. Based on our working relationship and collaboration with Save The Children US and public statements by UNICEF, Joint Council supports their organizational efforts to provide safe, strong, and nurturing family care for children in adversity.

#### Item #5 & #6

In 2008, Joint Council attempted to strengthen the Government of Ethiopia's efforts to build capacity within their Ministry of Women's Affairs through a grant of \$220,000 and a recommendation (supported by the U.S. Department of State) for the Ministry to assess a processing fee for all adoptions. Both the proposed grant and processing fee would be used to increase the Ministries ability to provide oversight and regulate the provision of children's services in Ethiopia, including intercountry adoption.

The proposed grant was to be funded by U.S.-based adoption service providers and other outside sources. The intention was for funds to be collected by Joint Council and distributed directly to the Government of Ethiopia with no direct, indirect, or other type of attribution to those providing the funding. This safeguard was designed to eliminate any possibility that a 'quid pro quo' (more adoption referrals in exchange for the grant) existed. The proposed grant was to be used to bolster all child protection efforts by the Ministry including family preservation, family-child reunification, kinship care,

and local adoption while providing the capacity to provide strong investigations and reviews of each child's case and the method by which they entered government care.

While the proposed grant included strong safeguards, the proposed grant, when taken out of the larger perspective of all Joint Council recommendations, could be viewed by some as an attempt to increase or maintain the number of intercountry adoptions by American families. However, it is noted in the Department of State's document that Joint Council's recommendations included;

- The strengthening of child protections,
- Increasing capacity for case review,
- The implementation of the principle of subsidiarity (using all local permanency options prior to consideration of intercountry adoption),
- A 50% reduction in the number of U.S., European, and Australian adoption service providers,
- The expansion of services provided by adoption service providers to include all means of ensuring permanency for children along with other community based care,
- A cap on the number of intercountry adoptions to eliminate increases until the Ministry had the appropriate capacity to implement strengthened oversight, regulations, and reviews.

Joint Council takes this opportunity to reiterate the integrity of the proposed grant by virtue of built in safeguards against 'quid pro quos' and the larger context of the totality of Joint Council's efforts and recommendations.

It is also noted that for a variety of reasons, neither the proposed grant nor processing fees were implemented by the Government of Ethiopia, Joint Council, or other stakeholders.

#### **Item #15**

Joint Council's recommendation to avoid public displays related to adoption was based on information provided by and at the request of the Ethiopian government, members of Ethiopian civil society and within the general public. Joint Council's recommendation in 2008 was initiated by and responsive to the cultural sensitivities expressed by those noted above.