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The Children in Families First Working Group Claims U.S. Department of State Arbitrarily Limits International Adoptions
Request Secretary Kerry to personally intervene

WASHINGTON, D.C. (December 19, 2013) – The “Children in Families Working Group”, a coalition of nonprofit advocacy organizations seeking change in global policies for children living outside of family care, asked Secretary of State John Kerry to conduct a thorough internal review of U.S. Department of State policies that prohibit orphaned children from certain countries from benefitting from international adoption.

According to a letter sent to the Secretary and signed by nine organizations, the group has concerns with recent actions taken by Office of Children’s Issues to block other countries from re-opening their international adoption programs, stating that as a whole, these decisions appear arbitrary and inconsistent. Since U.S. implementation of The Hague Convention on Inter-country Adoption in 2008, no U.S. adoptions have occurred from the 13 countries that have become Hague Convention partners. By contrast, in 2004 alone, more than 4,100 children were adopted into US families from these same countries.

Cambodia was cited as a specific example of the types of harms that occur because of these policies, noting that since international adoptions ceased in 2001, tens of thousands of Cambodian children have languished in orphanages, with many of those who “age out” ending up dead, on the streets or trafficked into the sex trade. The Department of State has recently indicated that it will oppose the re-opening of adoptions to the United States until Cambodia has an effective domestic adoption system in place.

Elizabeth Bartholet, Professor of Law and Director of the Child Advocacy Program at Harvard Law School, commented, “It’s vitally important that the Department of State shift gears. It needs to honor rather than trample child human rights, it needs to help kids get the loving homes they need, rather than lock kids into life-destroying institutions.”

Craig Juntunen, founder of Both Ends Burning stated "Despite the fact that families all over this country are hoping to adopt children, International adoption to the U.S. has declined dramatically, from nearly 23,000 children in 2004 to less than 9,000 in 2012. Unless action is taken, that decline will continue. More than 60,000 children would be growing up in the love and care of a family today if adoptions had remained stable at the rate it was in 2004. Instead these children are living compromised lives in orphanages. Scientific research has documented the harm that occurs to children in these circumstances. Their mental and physical development is permanently impacted. We are hopeful that Secretary Kerry will take action to re-establish connections with countries whose children are in dire need.”

Kathleen Strottman, Executive Director of the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute, who took part in a Congressional delegation visit to Cambodia this past February, commented “What is the most frustrating about decisions like the one recently made in Cambodia is that the Government of Cambodia has made significant progress in preventing the abandonment of
children and promoting domestic adoption but these advancements don’t ever seem to be enough.”

The full text of the letter to Secretary Kerry is available at: http://childreninfamiliesfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/LetterSOSKerry.pdf

Signing organizations include:
American Academy of Adoption Attorneys
Both Ends Burning
Center for Adoption Policy
Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute
Harvard Law School Child Advocacy Program
Joint Council for International Children’s Services
Kidsave
National Council For Adoption
Saddleback Church Orphan Care Initiative

SOURCE: Children in Families First Working Group