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Ethiopia

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Notice: Information regarding processing of Form I-600, Petition to Classify Orphan as an Immediate Relative, Filed at the U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa

In January, April and September, 2011, the U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa, the Office of Children's Issues of the Department of State, and the Department of Homeland Security U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) conducted public meetings for adoption service providers (ASPs), adoptive parents, and other stakeholders to address concerns about the quality and completeness of intercountry adoption cases presented in Ethiopia. To ensure prompt adjudication and avoid concerns about possible malfeasance, it is important that I-600 petitions (Petition to Classify Orphan as an Immediate Relative) and accompanying evidence be fully and carefully prepared before presentation to the Embassy.

Approximately 80% of I-600 petitions submitted to the U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa in recent months were incomplete, contained inconsistencies or errors, or did not contain sufficient evidence to document the child as an orphan under U.S. law. In addition, the Embassy continues to see cases which involve abandoned children but do not include sufficient evidence to document the abandonment and/or evidence of appropriate efforts to locate a child's birth family. The Embassy also has received evidence of unethical recruitment of children from birth relatives and cases involving known birth parents from whom parental rights have not been severed by the Ethiopian courts. In these cases, consular officers in Addis will need to take additional measures to confirm that a child meets the legal definition of orphan, which could delay processing by several months.

The Department of State and USCIS remind all families interested in adopting from Ethiopia that consular officers are required to forward any I-600 petition that is not "clearly approvable" to the USCIS Field Office in Nairobi for adjudication.

For families that already have an I-600 petition on file at the U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa, consular staff will advise them when a determination is made to approve the petition and the case may be scheduled for an immigrant visa interview in Addis Ababa, or when the petition is not "clearly approvable" and forwarded to USCIS Nairobi for adjudication. Upon receipt of a petition, USCIS in Nairobi will notify the parents that the case has been received and issue any requests for additional evidence if necessary. Families can find more information about processing I-600 petitions referred to USCIS Nairobi at www.USCIS.gov under "Adoption/Country Information."

It should be noted that, although this update specifically addresses I-600 petitions filed with the U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa, USCIS sees similar problems with I-600 petitions filed with the USCIS National Benefits Center (NBC). Families can contact NBC at NBC.Adoptions@dhs.gov.

If families have concerns about their adoption, we ask that they share this information with the Embassy, particularly if it involves possible fraud or misconduct specific to their cases. The Embassy takes all allegations of fraud or misconduct seriously.

The best way to contact the Embassy on issues related to adoption is by email at ConsAdoptionAddis@state.gov. Please include your name, your

child's name, your adoption agency, the date of the adoption (month and year), and, if possible, the immigrant visa case number for your child's case (this number begins with the letters ADD followed by several numbers and can be found on any document sent to you by the National Visa Center). Please let us know if we have your permission to share concerns about your specific case with Ethiopian government officials and any other person or entity.

We strongly encourage you to register any complaint that you may have about an adoption agency in the following ways:

- You may file a complaint with the **state licensing authority** where your adoption agency is licensed and conducts business. The Child Welfare Information Gateway, which is maintained by the Department of Health and Human Services, provides such a [list](#) .
- You may also file a report with the state's **Better Business Bureau** .
- If your agency is a Hague-accredited adoption service provider, you may file a complaint on the **Hague Complaint Registry** located at the link below. While Ethiopia is not a Convention country, the ASP' practice in a non-Convention country may impact its substantial compliance.
http://adoption.state.gov/hague_convention/agency_accreditation/complaints.php
The U.S. Embassy continues to work with the Government of Ethiopia to ensure that appropriate safeguards exist to protect prospective adoptive children, their birth parents, and prospective adoptive parents.

We encourage prospective and adoptive parents to remain in contact with their adoption service provider to stay up-to-date on any information pertinent to their individual case. The Department will post relevant information on www.adoption.state.gov as we receive it.