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Ethiopia

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Notice: Notes from Ambassador Jacobs' Meeting with Adoption Service Providers on December 11, 2012 in Addis Ababa

During a visit to Addis Ababa from December 8-11, 2012, Ambassador Susan Jacobs, Special Advisor for Children's Issues, met with the staff of U.S.-based Adoption Service Providers (ASPs). The Office of Children's Issues posts this notice to provide interested parties with information discussed at the meeting on December 11, 2012. Meetings between Embassy Addis' Adoptions Unit and ASPs take place several times a year and are announced to in-country representatives in advance. This notice recaps the issues discussed.

Administrative Discussion with Embassy Addis Ababa Adoptions Unit

I-600A Validity

An adoptive family's I-600A petition must be valid at the time that the I-600 petition and case file are submitted to the U.S. Embassy for review.

Currently, many adoption service providers email the embassy at ConsAdoptionAddis@state.gov following initial I-600A approval by the National Benefits Center in order to confirm the case number and the expiration date of the fingerprint approval and I-600A approval. Embassy Addis' Adoptions Unit requests that, at the time the adoption service provider (ASP) submits the original I-600 and other supporting documents, that it also provide a printed copy of the confirmation email mentioned above. Taking this additional step will ensure that the I-600A is valid at the time of I-600 submission, and help us avoid instances where a family might learn their fingerprint clearances are expiring very late in the Embassy review process.

The screening checklist linked on Embassy Addis' website [here](#) has been updated to reflect this new change.

Expedited processing

The Adoptions Unit will consider on a case-by-case basis expeditious processing for children with serious medical conditions that require urgent treatment that is unavailable in Ethiopia. Cases involving children who have serious but stable medical conditions or who are already undergoing treatment in Ethiopia generally do not qualify for expeditious processing. More typical medical conditions like asthma or stable HIV/AIDS, which are common reasons for requesting expedited processing, would not usually qualify.

Expedited cases are not exempt from the required review of orphan status through the Form I-604, Determination on Child for Adoption. We encourage all agencies to inform us as early as possible about cases involving children with serious medical conditions requiring urgent treatment that is unavailable in Ethiopia, even at the time of referral. The more information about the child's medical condition we have in advance, the faster we'll be able to move the case through the system.

For cases that we do expedite, it is essential that the ASP stay in close contact with the panel physician in order to keep the adoptive families informed of how long it will take for a child to be medically cleared for

travel. The Adoptions Unit encourages parents to direct questions about the timing of the medical clearance to their ASPs, so it is important that ASP staff be aware of the status of their respective children's panel physician clearances at all times. Doing so will ensure that a child who is cleared for a visa does not get held up because of unexpected delays with the medical clearance.

For some children with confirmed TB or other medical conditions that require lengthy testing prior to issuance of the panel physician report, the Adoptions Unit can work with the ASP to have the child examined prior to issuance of the Ethiopian passport.

Cases from the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region (SNNPR)

The Adoptions Unit requests that ASPs provide detailed information on the status of any cases which have been delayed for a significant period of time (i.e. 8+ months) because of the new review process instituted by the SNNPR Bureau of Women's, Children's, and Youth Affairs (BOWCYA) office.

Embassy Addis Ababa supports the efforts of SNNPR BOWCYA to accurately document all orphaned children within the region, and to follow the Alternative Care Guidelines outlined in an Ethiopian Ministry of Women's, Children's, and Youth Affairs 2009 directive on the subject. However, the Adoptions Unit recognizes that families adopting from Ethiopia's southern region have undergone an extremely lengthy and sometimes difficult process, and so we will expedite processing of those cases to the extent possible. As with cases that are expedited for medical reasons, cases from SNNPR are not exempt from the required review of orphan status through the Form I-604, Determination on Child for Adoption.

Addis Ababa Death Certificates

For children who come from Addis Ababa and whose parents are deceased, we still require a death certificate from the Addis Ababa municipal government if the children's parents died in the city. In general, a statement from a church or an Islamic court will not be sufficient, especially for cases from Addis Ababa where death certificates are fairly easy to obtain. More information about which local documents are acceptable is available on the [embassy's website](#) .

Key Points from Remarks by Ambassador Susan Jacobs, Special Advisor for Children's Issues

Standards of Practice

Adoption Service Providers continue to improve their standards of practice, and Embassy Addis' Adoptions Unit reports that the documentation submitted with adopted children's case files as part of the I-600 petition has significantly improved over the last year. However, it is important for ASPs to look beyond documentation and ask what they can do to ensure ethical and transparent adoptions that are in the best interest of the child. Ethical and transparent adoptions lead to clearer and more easily adjudicated petitions, and are in everyone's best interests.

Also with respect to documentation, we encourage ASPs to work with orphanages to ensure proper documentation of a child's entrance into care, including gathering information about the child's parentage, age, circumstances of abandonment, efforts made to locate parents or ensure that parental or guardianship rights were appropriately relinquished, and even a photograph of the child at the time of placement with the orphanage, if available. Ensuring that this information is gathered at the time of entrance into care enables your agency to ensure the children who are placed for intercountry adoption are truly available for adoption, and that there are no opportunities for misfeasance in the referral process. We recognize that many ASPs work with children who were placed in orphanages long ago, which makes it even more important to work with those orphanages to improve standards of practice to ensure that children are properly documented at the time they are placed for intercountry adoption.

Similarly, while it is important to be able to acquire the necessary documentation in any given adoption, it is more important to know how the orphanage comes by this information and how it operates on a daily basis. If an ASP contributes funds to an orphanage or relies on an affiliate to operate an orphanage on its behalf, the ASP needs to know where that money goes and ensure that it benefits the children. Moreover, ASPs need to ensure that the documentation about a child presented by an orphanage is a reflection of the true circumstances and not simply a document created to satisfy a request.

Finally, on the issue of raising the standards of practice, the Department of State is supportive of the new Intercountry Adoption Universal Accreditation Act of 2012, a measure that will require all U.S.-based ASPs to be Hague accredited, even when operating in countries like Ethiopia that have not acceded to the Hague Convention. The act will take effect July 14, 2014

Education of Parents

Ethical and transparent adoptions can only occur when birth families are making fully informed decisions without influence from outside parties. One of the ways ASPs can support ethical and transparent adoptions is to ensure that relinquishing parents and relatives understand the true meaning of intercountry adoption and the consequences of the decision to relinquish a child.

It is also important to ensure that adoptive parents are educated and informed about the children they are adopting. If an ASP or the orphanage has information about a child's medical condition or a behavioral issue, it is essential that the adoptive family be provided with that information.

Bringing an adopted child into a new family and culture, often while learning a new language, is extremely difficult. Just as educating relinquishing parents is essential for the best interests of the child, keeping adoptive parents informed must be a top priority for every ASP. We need to give every adoptive family the tools and information needed to succeed.