

Response to online petition about intercountry adoption

Stakeholders have made us aware of an online petition about intercountry adoption.

We are happy to answer any queries you may have about the work of the Attorney-General's Department and encourage you to contact us directly about any concerns or issues you would like answered. We can answer individual queries, as well as collective concerns by updating our website.

It is important to note that most of the items identified by the petition are already being addressed by the Department.

The Department is currently implementing many of the recommendations made by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services 2005 report, *Overseas Adoption in Australia*. These include the recent establishment of the National Peak Overseas Adoption Support Group and the passing of the *Australian Citizenship Act 2007*, which provides another option for children whose adoption has been finalised under full and permanent Hague Convention arrangements to obtain Australian citizenship.

The Government is working to implement all of the remaining accepted recommendations to ensure the best outcomes for children in need of intercountry adoption and for Australian families.

The revised *Commonwealth-State Agreement for the Implementation of the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and the Cooperation in respect of Intercountry Adoption* has been signed by the Federal, State and Territory Government Ministers. The Agreement is available on the Department's website. The revised Agreement will provide an excellent framework for the Federal Government to work in collaboration with the States and Territories to manage and improve intercountry adoption in Australia. Working groups are now being established to investigate important issues concerning intercountry adoption in Australia. These include the greater harmonisation of intercountry adoption practices and the investigation of alternative models of service delivery.

The Attorney-General's Department continues to investigate the development of new intercountry adoption programs and the expansion of existing programs, which focus upon the interests of the child and our commitments under the *Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect of Intercountry Adoption*. The countries with which we have had direct contact with in this context include Nepal, Kenya, Ethiopia, India, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and the United States of America. Preliminary investigation work into 25 other countries of interest is also underway and we will be seeking input from the Peak Support Group, States and Territories regarding these developments. More information about these investigations is available on the Department's website.

The comprehensive website on intercountry adoption can be found at <www.ag.gov.au/intercountryadoption>. It aims to provide information about investigations into possible new programs, as well as more detailed information about current programs.

The issue of accreditation of suitable non-government organisations to deliver adoption services has been raised with States and Territories by the Attorney-General, in accordance with Recommendation 18 of the *Overseas Adoption in Australia* report.

Discussion with States and Territories about this recommendation took place in the context of the renegotiation of the Commonwealth-State Agreement. A working group will now be established to investigate alternative models for the operation and administration of intercountry adoption in Australia, including a review of the system of accreditation.

Although accreditation is not an area where the Federal Government has direct responsibility, the Attorney-General's Department will remain proactive and engaged on this issue with the States and Territories.

The *Overseas Adoption in Australia* report recommendation to amend legislation to allow adoptions completed overseas and recognised by Australian law to be registered and lead to the issuing of a birth certificate, has been accepted. The implementation process is on-going. The Federal Government has approached State and Territory Ministers to request they amend their legislation to allow for the registration of births for future adoptions arriving in Australia. This request is at various stages of consideration by State and Territory Ministers and we will inform stakeholders of the responses once they are collectively known.

Another important step taken by the Federal Government to further engage the intercountry adoption community was the establishment of the first ever National Peak Overseas Adoption Support Group on 30 March 2008. The Peak Support Group is an exciting opportunity for consultation and will provide the intercountry adoption community with a clear voice to the Federal Government. The group held its inaugural meeting in May 2008 and will continue to meet up to four times a year.

Other issues raised by the report and matters of concern more generally to the intercountry adoption community can be raised with the Government through the Peak Support Group. The Government welcomes further consultation on them.

The Attorney-General's Department welcomes feedback from the adoption community and encourages you to e-mail <intercountryadoption@ag.gov.au> if you have any questions about the work of this Department.