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## Briefing on International Adoption-Related Issues

Special Advisor for Children's Issues Ambassador Susan Jacobs  
**Washington, DC**  
**November 1, 2010**

**MR. TONER:** Good afternoon. Welcome to the State Department. Happy Monday. I hope you all had a good Halloween. We're very fortunate to have today with us the Special Advisor for Children's Issues Ambassador Susan Jacobs. She's here today to address adoption issues. Today is the start of National Adoption Month, and she'll be talking about trends and numbers of adoptions from various countries as well as other issues, as well as previewing her travel to New York mid-November.

So without further ado, I'll introduce Ambassador. Please.

**AMBASSADOR JACOBS:** Good afternoon. I am very happy to be here today to commemorate National Adoption Month.

Senator Clinton and the Department of State joined President Obama and organizations across the country in celebrating National Adoption Month. During this month, the U.S. Government calls attention to the thousands of children in foster care in the United States and the millions of children around the world who are in need of a loving and permanent family.

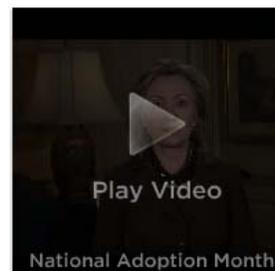
Last year alone, Americans adopted over 100,000 children domestically and about 11,000 children from overseas. This is a testament to the generosity of the American people. The U.S. Government is committed to promoting stability for children. We support the desire of American families to provide for children in need of a permanent family through adoption.

We reaffirmed our commitment to children when we joined The Hague Convention about two years ago. This is The Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Cooperation and Respect of Intercountry Adoption, usually referred to as The Hague. The State Department serves as the central authority for the Convention and there are now about 80 countries who are parties to it. It has ushered in a new era of responsibility, accountability, and increased safeguards in intercountry adoptions. Encouraging all countries to join the Convention will help protect adopted children, birth families, and adoptive families from fraud and abusive practices and will help ensure the transparency and integrity of the adoption process. We also continue to seek ways to improve safeguards in cases not subject to the Convention.

Our work on behalf of children through intercountry adoption requires strong, collaborative partnerships between the United States, foreign governments, and nongovernmental organizations. I'm delighted to report that today, to celebrate National Adoption Month, Ireland and Kazakhstan have joined The Hague Convention and we look forward to working with them, and we encourage other countries to also join.

One of the countries that we are working with is Ethiopia. The number of adoptions from Ethiopia continues to increase and it now ranks second in the world behind China in the number of children who are adopted from Ethiopia to the United States. At the beginning of September, I was pleased to accompany Senator Mary Landrieu and U.S. Agency for International Development Special Advisor for Orphans and Vulnerable Children Gary Newton to Ethiopia. We visited orphanages, child care centers, and other organizations and met with government leaders. One of the results already of this visit is greater cooperation between the United States, other countries that adopt from Ethiopia, and nongovernmental organizations as we work with the Government of Ethiopia to help them improve their child welfare system and to make sure that adoptions are transparent and honest.

The United States joined a number of other countries – in fact, all the countries that were then doing adoptions in Nepal, in suspending any new adoption cases based on abandonment. We recognize the heartache experienced by parents whose



### National Adoption Month

**Secretary Clinton:** "Over the last ten years, American families have opened their hearts and homes to more than 200,000 children from other countries. They have given vulnerable children the opportunity to thrive." [Full Text](#)

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cases have not yet been processed, and they are waiting for the completion of their investigations. We are especially mindful of the effects that any delay in an investigation may have in the life of a child, and for prospective adoption parents who are looking for a conclusion to their case and the ability to bring their child home.

However, investigations are necessary to ensure that the children sought for adoption are indeed orphans and eligible for inter-country adoption. A joint U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service and State Department team traveled to Nepal in an effort to determine how to address the existing cases. Officials at our Embassy in Kathmandu are making every effort to expedite these cases.

After the devastating earthquake in Haiti, the Departments of Homeland Security, Health and Human Services, and State coordinated efforts to ensure the safety and welfare of orphans who are in the process of being adopted by American families. Through the extraordinary commitment of the United States Government in Haiti, their personnel in Haiti and here in the United States, we united over 1,000 children with their adoptive families. During the crisis, 12 children were also brought from Haiti to the United States who had not previously been matched with families here. Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, and State have been working closely with the Government of Haiti to ensure the welfare of children and respect for Haitian laws and procedures. A delegation from the three agencies traveled to Haiti about four weeks ago to work with the Haitian Government to resolve these cases.

Next month – not next month, it's already November. In about two weeks, I will be in New York where we, along with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, will celebrate the attainment of U.S. citizenship by recently adopted children, and this is an event to which I'm really looking forward. One of my goals has always been to preside over a naturalization ceremony, so this is a very, very big deal. Together, we will also be meeting with adoption service providers to answer any questions that they might have, and I will also be meeting with various nongovernmental organizations that help educate and advocate for ethical adoption practices to help vulnerable children.

We applaud the efforts of the many governmental and private organizations that work tirelessly to find permanent homes for children. Our partnerships and work together can help ensure that every child in need is raised in a loving, permanent family. And for additional information about adoptions, I will be here to answer your questions, but you can also go to our website, [adoption.state.gov](http://adoption.state.gov). Thank you very much.

**MR. TONER:** We'll move to your questions. Any questions about adoptions? Nothing?

**AMBASSADOR JACOBS:** Yes.

**QUESTION:** I have a question. You mentioned the 12 Haitian children who were brought here and had not been matched. Where do those cases stand?

And then can I ask you quickly about a Guatemala matter? I understand that the United States has recently decided --

**AMBASSADOR JACOBS:** Let's do Haiti and then we'll do Guatemala.

**QUESTION:** Okay. And then I'll come back to Guatemala, fine.

**AMBASSADOR JACOBS:** We sent a team down there to meet with the Haitian officials and with the parents of these children, and we expect that these cases will be resolved very soon.

**QUESTION:** Resolved in what way? Will the children go back?

**AMBASSADOR JACOBS:** Resolved in whether the parents want to relinquish the children so that they can be adopted in the United States or --

**QUESTION:** So the parents have been identified?

**AMBASSADOR JACOBS:** Oh, yes. I mean, and the children have -- were in contact with their parents throughout this process.

**QUESTION:** Okay.

**AMBASSADOR JACOBS:** They're in a very safe, loving atmosphere. I have been in touch with the social worker there. So the children are well-protected and well-cared for. But it's up to the parents to decide whether or not they want to relinquish these children for adoption. And if they don't, we will send back the children whose parents want them returned.

**QUESTION:** Okay. And then can I ask --

**AMBASSADOR JACOBS:** Now Guatemala.

**QUESTION:** -- something about Guatemala?

**AMBASSADOR JACOBS:** Sure.

**QUESTION:** So I understand the United States has decided not to participate in the pilot project. Can you discuss a little bit about what the United States's concerns are in Guatemala? And two, the Guatemalans have asked the United States for investigations into three cases about children who the government there believes may have been --

**AMBASSADOR JACOBS:** Right. Okay.

**QUESTION:** -- inappropriately put up for adoption here. Have those DNA studies been done?

**AMBASSADOR JACOBS:** That is with the Department of Justice, and so I really don't have any information on that. In terms of the pilot project, every time we asked for details about it, there weren't any. So it turned out there really wasn't a pilot project to which -- in which we could participate. And in looking at the procedures and regulations that had been put in place, not very much had changed since adoptions had been shut down. So we are trying to work with the Guatemalan Government to help them set in place proper regulations and procedures, and at the same time, close the cases that are in the pipeline. There are hundreds of cases that need to be resolved, so we've asked them to focus on that.

Yes, sir.

**QUESTION:** Yeah, hi. Kirit Radia with ABC News. Forgive me if I missed you saying this earlier, but could you bring us up to speed on the negotiations with the Russians over the adoption programs there?

**AMBASSADOR JACOBS:** You -- I didn't say anything about it. (Laughter.)

**QUESTION:** If you could please bring us up to speed on where that is?

**AMBASSADOR JACOBS:** The negotiations proceed and we think they're going very well, and we hope to have an agreement before the end of the year.

**QUESTION:** And what can you say about the status of their demand on the ability to prosecute Americans and --

**AMBASSADOR JACOBS:** I really can't say anything about it because we're still negotiating.

**QUESTION:** Well, what's the status right now of adoptions from Russia?

**AMBASSADOR JACOBS:** In Russia, they're proceeding.

**QUESTION:** Okay. They -- so they --

**AMBASSADOR JACOBS:** They never stopped processing cases from the United States.

**QUESTION:** So then why -- what are the negotiations, then, about changing --

**AMBASSADOR JACOBS:** The negotiations involve changes that they would like to see in our procedures and changes that we would like to see in theirs.

**QUESTION:** But during the time of these negotiations, children are still coming over from Russia.

**AMBASSADOR JACOBS:** Yes, they are.

**MR. TONER:** Anything else? Any other questions? Well, thank you.

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