

Parliament of Australia Senate
Senate Inquiry into International Child Abduction to and from Australia
By email

From Robin Bowles

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Dear Committee Members

I have been affected by/involved in International Parental Abductions since 1999, when my 18-month-old first grandchild was abducted to France by his mother. France was one of the first 3 signatories to the Hague Convention. However, after 5 years of legal battles with French courts my grandson, who by then only spoke French and was enrolled in school, was not returned. His 'habitual place of residence' had, of course, become France.

Our story has a partly happy ending. My son moved to France twelve years ago, obtained access every second weekend and half of the holidays, uses his dual nationality (his father is French) to work and pay child support and at least sees his son regularly. Since 2006 we (his grandparents) have seen him once a year. I only see my son once a year as well. But many parents never see their children again.

In 2001, horrified by the realization that about three families a WEEK go through the pain and anguish we were experiencing, as a non-fiction crime writer I obtained my son's permission to write his story, to raise public awareness about this increasing phenomenon, here and around the world. The Attorney-General's Central Authority (whom I knew by first names by then!) assisted with information and contacts and through them and other sources I was able to interview and tell the stories of several left-behind parents, three abducting fathers and five children, who had been abducted and then returned, either through the Hague Convention or re-abduction. But the Hague Convention does not always work, even from Hague signatory countries.

There is a whole re-abduction industry out there, charging exorbitant fees and subjecting kids to the double whammy of abduction and then re-abduction. Kids are grabbed on their way to school; given Coke with valium in it; hidden under blankets on the back floors of cars; lied to by the people they should trust most—their parents; told the left-behind parent doesn't love them, has killed their dog, burnt down their house and the dreadful list goes on. I was going to call my book *In Their Best Interests*, because every parent I interviewed who'd taken a child, or arranged the re-abduction, used that phrase. I shortly became convinced that the children's interests are NEVER well-served by either parent taking a child away from all he or she knows and loves. It is a *terrible* thing to do to a child. My grandson, now nearly 14, still needs psychological counseling. My book is called *Taken in Contempt*, because these children's needs and rights are treated contemptuously by their abducting parents.

Since 2001, when my book was first published, I have received about 3 calls a month from left-behind parents, mainly fathers, who need advice and support. Many have no

hope, their kids taken to Japan, where foreign parents have no rights, or a Shari'a Law country, or other non-signatory destination. Abducting parents usually do a lot of research. All I can do is listen. The best-known of these fathers, whose PR campaign I managed from December 2008, when he obtained his publication order (In my previous life I owned a PR company). His case was very unusual,

finally started school, when I agreed to help, it was 3 years, until the child by almost a miracle, was advised of his location in more actively than most

was assisted by an 'underground' of militant mothers and priests and nuns from a Baptist church group (yes, nuns!)

. Anyway, that is a book in itself.

I am sending a PDF copy of *Taken in Contempt*, in case committee members wish to read it. I would be happy to send hard copies if required. The Attorney General's Dept, in 2001, bought 200 copies to distribute amongst their internal and international staff, as it was the first book of its kind in the world at that time to give lay people an understanding of the Hague Convention. In my experience most JUDGES (especially French ones) didn't understand it back then! Chief Justice Alastair Nicholson wrote a Foreword, commending the book as 'a book that needed to be written'.

My book is my submission, as I have said all I can say in that book. Nothing much has changed. If anything, the incidence is higher and the number of little kids torn from their homes has increased. Public awareness is now wider, especially since went public. As we have seen from the case, being able to issue Interpol alerts (not for abduction), and thus having members of the public looking out for were all helpful

. The story is not over. will be damaged for life due to his covert and imposed deceitful existence, living in shelters, learning aliases, struggling with new languages, wearing disguises, learning to tell fibs about who he was, always moving on and in hiding.

I have firmed my opinion since I wrote my book. Back then, I tried to put both sides of the criminalisation/non-criminalisation argument, which was outlined in a 1997 Family Law Council report and in overseas jurisdictions. **I now ask the Committee to seriously consider the criminalisation of International Parental Abduction.**

Regardless of who takes a child without permission, it is still abduction. Child stealing. Kidnapping. Taking a person away without their consent. At times using force, which could be regarded as assault. Unlawfully detaining that person. The criminal sentence for a convicted abductor is a long one. The sentences for the abducted children and the left-behind parent is Life.

Thank you for considering my submission. Robin Bowles