

From: Ms Kerri Weeks [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, 6 May 2005 11:39 AM
To: Committee, FHS (REPS)
Subject: Submission - Inquiry into adoption of children from overseas

The Secretary
Standing Committee on Family and Human Services
Inquiry into Adoption of Children from Overseas

Dear Members

I would like to draw to the Committee's attention an issue of relevance to adoptive parents of children born in Taiwan. I am a parent of beautiful twin boys adopted from Taiwan in 2004- they were allocated to my husband and I at 4 weeks of age in May 2004, and we travelled to Taipei to meet our sons and return to Australia in early December 2004 - when they were 6 months of age.

It has come to the attention of parents adopting from Taiwan that the Netherlands allows Taiwanese babies to join their adoptive families approximately 4-6 weeks earlier than is the case for Australian families.

The average period of waiting from allocation until travel home, for an Australian adopted child in Taiwan, is about 23 weeks. During this time, the case is applied to the Supreme Court, the Family Court and the Child Welfare Foundation. The Child Welfare Foundation evaluates the suitability of the adoptive parents, interviews the relinquishing parent/parents and makes a recommendation to the Family Court judge. After the case has been approved by the CWF, the relinquishing parents personally appear in the Family Court and submit a waiver of their right to appeal the decision. The Family Court judge, being in agreement that the adoption is in the best interest of the child, issues the Initial Court Decree 4 - 6 weeks later.

Dutch authorities allow children placed with Dutch couples to travel home to be with their families at this stage of the process – when the Initial Court Decree has been issued.

Australian authorities, however, do not issue a visa for the child to travel until a further 4 to 6 weeks - when the Final Decree is granted and the documents have been translated.

The earlier visa approval for Dutch families is based on the approval of adoptive parents from the Dutch authorities, their permission to adopt being granted by the Ministry of Justice in the Netherlands. This, along with the child's name and date of birth, is sent to the Dutch Trade Office in Taipei through official channels.

Christian Salvation Service (the agency in Taiwan) includes a copy of the Initial Court Decree and the child's household registry with the visa application. The visa is issued and the child may travel with the understanding that all adoption documents and translations

will be sent to the adoptive parents and made available to the Dutch authorities within six months of the child's arrival in Holland.

Christian Salvation Service informs the birth family of the child's planned travel and the birth parents confirm their understanding that the child will be leaving Taiwan. As in Australia, Dutch adoptions are finalised 12 months after the child has been placed with the family.

It is my understanding that the Australian Commerce and Industry Office in Taiwan use the adoption documents to verify the child's eligibility to depart from Taiwan legally.

I would like to suggest to this Inquiry that other documentation be used, such as the Initial Court Decree and an Affidavit of release for travel from the relinquishing parent.

If, like the Dutch authorities, the Federal Government is able to authorise Australian children to travel home to be united with their adoptive family after the Initial Decree has been granted, there would be many benefits for these children.

As the Committee is no doubt aware, the earlier that children can attach to their adopted parents the better. I ask the Committee to explore options which would enable Australian immigration requirements to be fulfilled and allow adopted children to be united with their Australian adoptive parents at the earliest possible time.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Yours sincerely
Kerri Weeks

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