

## Response to Christian World Adoption Statement September 16 2009-09-17

*Foreign Correspondent* approached Christian World Adoption at least half a dozen times requesting an interview with the organisation, but received no response to emails or phone messages. *Foreign Correspondent* was fully prepared to travel to CWA's head office in South Carolina to conduct the interview. CWA chose not to respond and therefore not to participate in the program.

*Foreign Correspondent* disputes a number of claims and assertions in a statement from CWA posted directly to producer Mary Ann Jolley well after the program 'Fly Away Children' aired. We understand the statement has been widely circulated by CWA to its constituents, clients and others.

We will deal only with the disputed claims.

- 1) *"The lady called Michelle, who is shown in the video interviewing children to be adopted, was not a CWA staff person..."*

The vision of Michelle Gardner talking to villagers about international adoptions seen in *Foreign Correspondent's* "Fly Away Children" is from a DVD clearly labelled "Christian World Adoption, Ethiopian Orphan Project, Older Child Interviews" and was sent out by Christian World Adoption to those who inquired about adopting through the organisation.

Michelle Gardner worked with CWA from November 2005 until May 2007. Michelle states this in an email to us and CWA literature from the time confirms she was the Ethiopian Older Child Program Co-ordinator for CWA.

- 2) *"These videos were not made at CWA orphanages but rather it was at the invitation of the Ethiopian regional officials that Michelle visited these areas to meet with the children who needed help."*

*Foreign Correspondent* understands from former CWA workers that regional officials and police were paid (compensation for not being at work) by CWA to organise villagers to attend the adoption days that appeared in the DVD. It was not a case that local authorities invited CWA to the villages "to meet with the children who needed help."

- 3) *"If the network had done a little more homework, they would have discovered that the adoption process is a very long one and that the birth family must appear in court on two different occasions to be questioned. At any time, they can change their minds and keep the child. During our intake procedure, the social worker has a sheet, written in the native language that explains in detail the meaning of adoption and what the choices are."*

The Ethiopian women who gave their children up for international adoption that we featured in "Fly Away Children" all went through the court system, but all told stories of having been lied to by international adoption agencies to coerce them into relinquishing their children. For example, they were told they would receive regular updates about their children and never did and one woman was told the agency would support her remaining daughter. An orphanage aware of their cases and Ethiopian adoption experts confirmed their claims.

- 4) Regarding CWA's claim it can't guarantee the health of a child. Lisa Boe was told repeatedly her child was a normal, healthy five year old, and the documents that CWA completed for the Ethiopian court also claimed his health was normal. Yet Lisa's adopted son has very

serious illnesses. For example, he has seizures and according to a CWA worker we spoke to in Addis Ababa he was having seizures while he was living in a CWA orphanage prior to the adoption process being completed. It would be almost impossible for anyone, let alone a medical practitioner, not to have noticed this condition.

*Foreign Correspondent* sighted the document Lisa Boe obtained from a CWA doctor showing he referred her son to an orthopaedic specialist for assessment. His symptoms were clearly obvious for the doctor to this. Yet this document was not included in his official documents and his physical condition was described as “normal” in court documents.

As mentioned in “Fly Away Children” when we confronted the CWA doctor about the Boe case, he couldn’t remember it, but he did admit to having been pressured by CWA to change medical records of children.

- 5) Regarding international adoptions being a \$100 million industry for Ethiopia. It is not only the processing fees that contribute to this figure, but the large number of Ethiopians employed by international adoption industry and the money that flows on to other industries. This figure was given to us off the record by a reputable international NGO operating in Ethiopia. Fearing being shut down by the government, the NGO was unable to talk publicly about this.
- 6) Regarding the program’s emotive use of the term “harvesting.” This is a term used by child protection experts to describe the active recruiting of children for international adoption.

*Foreign Correspondent* stands by its story.