



CCAI Delegation to Honduras

September 2, 2005

Delegation Members: Senator Mary Landrieu (D-LA), Paul Singer (CCAI Board), Barbara Walzer (CCAI Board), Kerry Hasenbalg (CCAI Executive Director), Kathleen Strottman (LD for Senator Landrieu), Wendy Cosby (CCAI Program Director), and Brian Luwis (Adoptive Father).

Goals and Objectives:

- Strengthen relations with Honduran officials who oversee adoption and the care of children in need of homes and in particular with the first Lady of Honduras, Aguas Ocana , who has a great passion for the children of Honduras.
- Demonstrate that the US government is a strong advocate of adoption for children who cannot remain in the care of their biological family.
- Obtain a deeper understanding of existing and planned laws, policies and systems related to domestic and international adoption, foster care and at-risk families.
- Encourage the Honduran government to consider ratifying and implementing the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption.

Overview:

While our trip to Honduras was brief, it comes at a critical juncture for international adoption in Honduras. In the early nineties, international adoption had become so plagued by scandal that the government of Honduras made the decision to shut it down long enough to implement a new series of protections against kidnapping, child trafficking and corruption. New procedures enacted included a ban on private adoptions, the requirement that all adoption agencies be licensed by IHNFA, the government authority in charge of adoption, and a requirement that all children given up for adoption must be unconditionally abandoned to a court of law as opposed to private attorneys (which was the prior system). The only problem with the new system is that it has so many required procedures and rules that it takes an inordinately long time to finalize an adoption and as a result, children are waiting to be adopted from institutions for several years. Despite



reports that there are over 3,000 children living in the care of private orphanages (Committee on Rights of the Child, 2000), only six adoptions took place in all of 2002.

A recent controversy only threatens to make this situation worse. The First Lady of Honduras recently Aguas Ocana was extremely upset following reports that an U.S. based adoption agency had been advertising Honduran babies as being available for adoption. The agency “orphans overseas” is reportedly not registered to perform adoptions in Honduras (which is required by law). Making matters worse, the information regarding the purportedly available children included a “processing fee” of \$11,500 and evoked allegations of “baby selling” on the internet.

In our meeting with the First Lady, we acknowledged these concerns and pledged our support for the Honduran government’s efforts to eliminate the opportunity for corruption in connection with international adoption. Senator Landrieu stressed that the primary purpose of the Hague Convention is to put in place an international adoption framework under which participating countries can match waiting children with adoptive parents and encouraged the Honduran government to consider the Hague as the means to bring about further reform. Vilma Morales (President of the Supreme Court) and Lolis Salas (Chair of IHNFA) were also present in this meeting.

After this meeting, the delegation attended a reception at the home of former President of Honduras, Carlos Flores. In attendance were high level representatives of the Honduran government and courts. While there was no formal conversation at this event, members of the delegation did have the opportunity to speak one on one with individuals engaged at all levels in child welfare in Honduras.

Outcomes:

This trip definitely achieved its objective of forming the foundation for an ongoing relationship with the First Lady of Honduras and assuring her that she was not alone in her concern regarding corruption. It was not immediately clear what actions Honduras would be willing to take to address the serious shortfall in the number of adoptions processed. The delegation came away with the sense that follow up was needed in order to determine what if anything can be done to expedite the processing of cases without compromising the integrity of the process overall.