

Guatemala lacks national legislation to regulate international adoptions; as a result, babies are openly exported. There is little state control over baby trafficking and most mothers, often illiterate, are unaware of their rights. Critics say Guatemala has become a baby farm where adoptions are too easy and prone to corruption.

Juan Carlos Llorca of the Associated Press, reported that in a six-month period in 2006 “the government has brought thirty criminal cases against notaries for falsifying paperwork, allegedly providing false birth certificates, and even creating false identities to avoid having to involve the birth father or the parents of underage birth mothers.”²⁰ Lawyers involved in Guatemalan adoptions can earn between \$12,000 and \$15,000 (U.S.) to complete the paperwork, while in some cases the couples pay as much as \$60,000 for a baby.

Josefina Arellano, who directs the government office that ultimately approves each adoption, says women give up multiple children in a row because it is lucrative. One Guatemalan mother named **Elivia**, however, won a

yearlong legal battle, proving her baby had been illegally taken from her and placed for adoption. Elivia was forcibly taken to a house in San Pedro Yepocapa, Chimaltenango, and prevented by nurses from seeing her newborn. The lawyer handling the adoption confiscated Elivia's furniture and belongings and gave her 100 Quetzales (\$15) a week for expenses.²¹ As much as sixty percent of the country's population is considered poor by international standards and twenty percent are extremely poor. That means living on less than \$1 a day.

Casa Alianza, a children's rights group based in San José, Costa Rica, waged a legal battle that convinced a Guatemalan Supreme Court judge to order the baby, Pablo Ramírez Caño, back to his mother. By then, he was twelve months old.²² UNICEF has spoken out in favor of the state regulating adoption and encouraged Guatemalans to adopt these children so they don't have to leave the country.