

Joint Council Update
Program: International Relations Initiative
Date: October 15, 2007
Regarding : Guatemala 5000 Update



GUATEMALA 5000 SUMMARY UPDATE

Your Voice Counts

The call-in, fax and email campaign generated thousands of inquiries into the offices of the United States Congress, UNICEF and the Guatemalan government. Initially designed for only three days, the campaign began late last week and continued through this past Friday. Your calls, emails and faxes resulted in Joint Council being contacted by all involved including Congressional offices, UNICEF Headquarters in New York, UNICEF Guatemala and the administration of Guatemalan President Oscar Berger. As a result, Joint Council directly advocated with all parties and found virtually all to be very responsive to your calls, emails and faxes. Your voice most definitely counts!

Support Grows

The Guatemalan children served through Joint Council's Guatemala 5000 initiative continue to gain widespread public attention and the support of key stakeholders including;

- United States Congressional Coalition on Adoption,
- United States Department of State,
- The Hague Permanent Bureau,
- UNICEF Guatemala.

Visibility Increases

Through the efforts of Joint Council Member Organizations and thousands of adoptive families, the initiative has been publicized extensively in;

- 24 blogs including the widely read Huffington Post,
- 682 web pages including the civil action site Congress.org,
- 21 media outlets including ABC, NBC and CBS affiliates.

The Office of President Berger

During the past seven days, Joint Council has been in frequent and direct communication with the Office of President Oscar Berger regarding his administration's position on the adoption cases currently in-process. Despite the ongoing dialogue between Joint Council and the Berger administration, we are unable to report that President Berger supports the unencumbered completion of the adoptions in-process. Similarly, we cannot confirm the President's support for the amendment to Article 52 of bill #3217, which would allow for the completion of in-process cases under current law. It is our understanding that the administration will publish an announcement on the transition cases on or around October 19th.

The administration has provided Joint Council with a statement and asked that we communicate the content to the larger community. Unfortunately, the statement falls short of supporting the best interest of the children whose adoptions are currently in-process. Joint Council will continue to advocate with the administration to ensure that all in-process adoptions are completed and the best interest of each child is truly served.

The following reflects the actions of each organization noted above.

Congressional Coalition on Adoption

The four Co-Chairs of the Congressional Coalition strongly support the completion of all adoptions in-process. Letters from members of the United States Congress will be delivered to Guatemalan President Oscar Berger and UNICEF Executive Director Ann Veneman on October 26, 2007. Please be sure that your congressional representatives (House and Senate) have signed on to these two very important letters.

United States Department of State

On Friday September 28th, the U.S. Department of State revised its Warning on Guatemala to include support for the transition cases.

The Hague Permanent Bureau

It is Joint Council's understanding that the Hague Permanent Bureau supports the transition cases and has suggested specific language as an amendment to Article 52 of the 'adoption law', bill #3217.

UNICEF Guatemala

It is Joint Council's understanding that UNICEF Guatemala supports the amendment to Article 52.

Dr. Manuel Manrique, Director of UNICEF Guatemala has notified Joint Council that due to the large volume of calls, faxes and emails, his office is unable to respond directly to all inquiries, especially those who faxed their letters of concern. Dr. Manrique extends his apologies to anyone who has not received a direct response from his office and wants all to know of his ongoing concern for the children of Guatemala.

UNICEF Headquarters

On Friday October 5th, UNICEF updated its stated position on intercountry adoption to reference the best interest of the child during a country's transition to full implementation of the Hague Convention. In Joint Council's assessment, the statement is vague and open to interpretation by those supporting transition cases and those in opposition. Joint Council continues to call on the UNICEF Executive Director Ann Veneman to directly and unequivocally support the completion of all adoptions in-process.

Best Wishes,

Tom

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