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# InterCountry Adoptee Voices

## Meeting with Department of Social Services & Attorney General's Dept

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22 June 2015 : 11am - 1:30pm AEST

### Federal Government Attendees:

Flora Carapellucci (DSS)  
Allison Wood (AGD)  
Trish Van Dartel (DSS)  
Solange Handley (DSS)  
Robyn Balfour (DSS)

### InterCountry Adoptee Voices (ICAV)

ICAV was established in 1998 by Lynelle Long as a result of working together with 27 other adoptees and the Post Adoption Resource Centre NSW to write a book about the experiences of transracial and InterCountry (IC) adoption in Australia. The book called *The Colour of Difference: Journeys in Transracial Adoption* was published in 2001 and ICAV grew over 17 years to include hundreds of adoptees from Australia and worldwide. ICAV was one of the first networks world-wide to include adoptees of any racial background, regardless of country of birth, and to bring our voices together and share our experiences to educate the wider public of the issues that impact our lives.

### ICAV Key Recommendations:

- We request ongoing commitment from Govt to include adult IC adoptees in future InterCountry Adoption policy decisions, including adoptee representation in future ICA meetings / Working / Reference Groups e.g. The Hague Special Commission.
- We request AGD continued commitment to push Sending Countries to develop Pre/ Post Adoption Support Services in conjunction with Australia, that will be ongoing for lifetime of the adoptee.
- We request Federal Government to take the Leadership Role as per their Responsibility under The Hague in ensuring Post Adoption Support in Australia is adequately funded and provided for IC Adoptees. This could be done via funding equivalent spent on Prospective Parent Hotline, or an increase in scope of current Hotline. Ideas for what equivalent funding could provide include Pre & Post Adoption Support i.e. referral and access to counselling support, education to professionals for provision of counselling; search & reunion counselling and referrals, referral to legal advice specialising in ICA, support non profit or NGO organisations like ICAV to provide services e.g websites, social events, books, documentaries; creation of a referral database & service for all

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involved in ICA - parents, adoptees, bio families, professionals, researchers, Govt, educators; and a central database to keep original birth certificates and DNA samples for access to our rightful identity.

### **Discussion Topics & Summary**

**Anna Kopekin:** Filipino adoptee residing in QLD, Member of International Adoptive Families of QLD (IAFQ), Magazine Editor for IAFQ, International Adoption Day Committee Member, Jigsaw Member, Prospective Adoptive Parent for child from Philippines, SBS Doco "Are you my Mother 2008, Presenter at Philippines Adoption Camp.

#### *View of 1800 Hotline from IC Adoptee who is Adopting*

- Experience was positive and found the Social Workers to be well trained, empathic, with a sound knowledge of QLD State resources.
- Open acknowledgement of lack of resources for adult inter-country adoptees.
- Beneficial only for prospective parents who have no/little knowledge at all, whereas current prospective parents gain very little from this service.
- Great start by Fed Govt but question its overall effectiveness given the small numbers who will access it compared to the numbers of current adoptive families and adoptees who are suffering from lack of Post Adoption Services.
- Followup email from Hotline indicated a review of services in the future but no timeframe.

Action Item: What is this timeframe?

Action Item: ICAV request an official increase to the current scope or equivalent monies be spent on providing resources for current adoptive families and adoptees.

**Sharna Ciotti:** Korean Adoptee residing in SA, Social Worker, Adoptee educator for prospective adoptive parent seminars with the SA Dept of ICA, volunteer worker with young InterCountry adoptees, recent media interview on ABC7:30 Report on ICA, Presenter at the Federal PM Senior Advisor April 2015 Meeting.

#### *Pre Adoption Requirements AGD should include when negotiating new / reviewing existing Programs with Sending Countries*

- Establish a Central Database to collect adoptee info, including who relinquished, the agency contacts info, DNA samples of adoptee and relinquishing contact, full medical information, and to track/monitor adoption success long term i.e. to prevent adoption breakdowns (note: no research to understand current statistics)
- Country of origin needs: translation of documents service; contact org/person info for search/reunion in years to come with dual language skills; education to these contacts

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re expectations / cultural differences / value differences to help facilitate in a sensitive fashion the search, reunion & ongoing contact.

- What is the AGD doing to conduct or query 2nd or 3rd checks done to legitimately qualify whether the child is a true orphan and whether other alternatives were explored first e.g. extended family or community?

Action Item: Can AGD include these items? If not, what is preventing and how can we assist?

Action Item: can AGD continue to give commitment they will push for preservation of records in Sending Countries, creating long term policy and procedures to support this?

**Rupali Karvouniaris:** Indian Adoptee residing in SA, adopted at age 12 and trafficked to Australia via ICA, reunited with her bio mum late 2014, Presenter at the Federal PM Senior Advisor April 2015 Meeting.

### *Trafficked adoptee support required in Australia and Sending Country*

- Advice on how to obtain legal assistance i.e. legal repository of skilled practitioners in ICA for referral
- Financial assistance to pay for legal advice
- Financial assistance to pay for psychological counselling
- Translation services and assistance to obtain documents in Sending Country including Government Dept & Orphanage
- Travel & Translation services for search & reunion with biological family
- Advice on obtaining accommodation & support services should adoption break down and adoptee be left on own
- Case worker to support adoptee who is unbiased i.e. not an adoptive parent
- Child's Right Advocate in Australia who can push for child's rights should the adoptive family not listen to child's claims of being trafficked - including translator for child who has arrived at older age and cannot communicate in English

Action Item: what can be done to provide these services for Trafficked adoptees given there are at least 9 cases of adults in Australia to date, with younger ones still to speak out?

**Gabbie Beckley:** Sri Lankan adoptee residing in NSW, Child Protection Case Worker with NSW Dept of Family & Community Services, studying a Masters of Social Work, returned and reunited with her biological family, Current Project underway to build a house in Sri Lanka to facilitate return and search service for other Sri Lankan adoptees who want to learn about Sri Lankan culture and family life.

### *Reunion & Biological Family Perspectives on ICA / Ethics*

- ICA should not be a solution to poverty.
- Biological families want other alternatives to keep their children but feel they haven't a choice.

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- Dual citizenship for adoptees

Action Item: what can be done to allow us to bring our bio families to this country under Immigration rules?

- From a child protection view point in Australia we have a significant risk of harm threshold to remove children from parents.

Action Item: do we have a similar threshold for measuring the risk to a child's welfare from other countries in regard to ICA? What does AGD check to ensure other alternatives are investigated before ICA occurs? How can this be improved with Sending Countries?

Action Item: what can be done to allow possible Dual Citizenship for future IC adoptees? For historical adoptions?

**Dominic Golding:** Vietnamese Adoptee residing in VIC, member of VANISH, Social Worker and Masters in Social Work, Playwright/ Actor, CoFounder of International Adoptee Community, Presenter at the Federal PM Senior Advisor April 2015 Meeting.

### *Special Needs issues for Prospective Families & Adoptee*

- Medical records need to be accurate and kept in Central Database, provided to family & adoptee at request
- Professionals eg Doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, teachers, child experts need training in ICA issues over the life cycle and special needs issues e.g. medically diagnosed issues, long term effects of orphanage life for older adoptees - RAD, later discovered additional needs not diagnosed
- Education to public in general about IC adoptees and the "invisible" special needs i.e. of abandonment/loss

Action Item: What can be done to provide better Post Adoption Support for those adoptees coming to Australia in future years who have special needs requirements?

Action Item: What education is being provided for professionals to help them support the adoptive family and adoptee better?

**Sue-Yen Bylund:** Vietnamese Adoptee residing in WA, WA Member of NICAAG providing advice to the former AGD on ICA, CoFounder of International Adoptee Community, and former ICASN WA Rep, Presenter at the Federal PM Senior Advisor April 2015 Meeting, ICAV Presenter at May 2015 meeting with Green's Senator Rachel Siewart.

### *Post Adoption Support needs in Australia*

- Art 9(c) Hague Convention – *obligation to take all appropriate measures to promote the development of adoption counselling and post-adoption services.*
- The Implementation and Operation of the 1933 Hague Intercountry Adoption Convention: GUIDE TO GOOD PRACTICE (HCCH) – Chapter 9 – Post Adoption Matters

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- Joint responsibility between Commonwealth & State to provide Post Adoption Services but current provision is very limited and not adequate as most services stop at Post Placement (usually first 12 months after arrival) which is not the same as Post Adoption, which is life-long support. eg. NSW PARC currently has equivalent of 4FTE to provide Post Adoption Support to ALL Adoption affected people in NSW & ACT, largely assists Domestic Adoption. The Forced Adoption APS funding went to only those of Forced Adoption Era. IC Adoptees end up getting almost nothing.
  - Require funding & training for professionals to support IC adoptees with database of professionals whom we can access
  - Financial assistance for ongoing mental health support
  - Authorised Government to Government facilitated Search & Reunion Services in both Australia & Sending Country
  - Education and Consultation to Govt by professionals & adoptees
  - Financing of Research in ICA
  - see appendix attachment by SueYen.

Action Item: can Federal Govt give commitment they will form a Post Adoption Working Group with the CAs and the IC Adoption Community as promised in Nov 2011?

#### **Other Adoptee Attendees who Contributed:**

**Lynelle Long:** Vietnamese Adoptee residing in NSW, Adoptee Representative on NICAAG advising former AGD on ICA, Founder/Director of ICAV (formerly ICASN), United Adoptees International agent, member of NSW Committee on Adoption & Permanent Care; Facilitator & Convenor of ICAV & Federal PM Senior Advisor April 2015 Meeting.

**Leanne Tololeski:** Korean adoptee residing in WA, participated in the May 2015 ICAV meeting with Green's Senator Rachel Siewart in Perth, returned to Sth Korea with GOAL via the First Trip Home program and was reunited with biological father. Ongoing communication to father through GOAL but it is limited.

**Pia Meehan:** Korean adoptee residing in WA, attended the 2007 International Korean Adoptee Association (IKAA) Symposium in Seoul, established Korean Adoptees in Australia (KAA) group, committee member of Korean Adoptees in Australian Network (KAiAN) which was established in 2014 through funding from Australia Korea Foundation.

**Chantal Doecke:** Vietnamese adoptee residing in SA, arrived via Operation Babylift and has been involved in media coverage and documentaries on ICA, has just received DNA results back, current Mentor to young adoptees in the SA PASS program, contributor to cultural program run by Vietnamese Community Centre in SA.

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**Gabby Malpas:** Chinese adoptee residing in NSW, adopted in NZ, Artist who bases much of her work on the experience of being a transracial adoptee which she openly speaks about, Advisory Committee Member of NSW Post Adoption Resource Centre.

**Claudia Mangel:** Colombian adoptee residing in NSW, Studied law and currently working in State & Commonwealth Education Policy & Advocacy, extended family are Founders of Australian Friends of FANA (Colombian Adoption Support Network).

**Tara Davis:** Bangladeshi adoptee residing in TAS, studying Masters of Psychology with goal of becoming a registered psychologist, member of the TAS Consultative Committee for International Adoptions (TCCIA), has had no strong interest in searching for biological family or returning to country of origin.

We THANK YOU for your valuable time & effort to listen to us and we look forward to working together in the future!