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## **Russian orphans often leave for new families in the U.S. and Spain**

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Through the fault of foreign adoptive parents 15 Russian children have died since 1996. The latest tragic incident occurred in the U.S. on July 8, when Miles Harrison, the father adopted child Dima Yakovlev, left him unattended in a car under the scorching sun. As a result, the child died of heat, and his father arrested on charges of manslaughter.

The Director of Education, additional education and social protection of children, Ministry of Education and Science, Mrs Alina Levitskaya was interviewed on the topic of what happens to place Russian kids in the foreign family and what steps does the state take to avoid their deaths, told

**-- Alina Afakoevna, tell me, please, in Russia over the past two years has the rules about adoption of children by foreigners simplified or, conversely, become more difficult?**

-- The answer to this question is far from clear. On the one hand, the adoption of Order 654 (the first ruling made in November 2006), allowed the removal of unnecessary bureaucratic obstacles. That is, organizations now do not need to annually obtain a permit to operate for adoption.

On the other hand, the same order itemized in detail the procedure and all the requirements for participants in the process. In case of violations, even minor, we may suspend a permit to enable the organization to bring everything in order. If there are serious violations, we have the right to raise the issue of termination of the organization in the Russian Federation.

**-- How many accredited foreign agencies are involved in adoptions of children in Russia?**

-- Authorization for the activity to prepare for adoption in Russia was given to 71 organization, from ten countries. We are currently considering another five documents from organizations that previously worked in the Russian Federation organizations.

Moreover, at a meeting of the interdepartmental commission on adoptions, held July 11, it was decided to begin receiving documents from organizations that had not previously worked in Russia.

**-- So the new international organization can obtain permission to the Russian Federation for adoption?**

-- A non-government organisation must first register the right to carry out non-profit activities in the Federal Registration Service. After that we at the Ministry can give permission for activities related to adoptions. The organization can obtain permission if its documents meet all our requirements, passed the approval of Russia Foreign Ministry, Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia, and Russia MOJ.

**-- Could you tell us about the results of inspections of international organizations in 2008?**

-- This year, the Ministry conducted several tests, which were suspended the activities of two U.S. missions organizations and it was decided to suspend the activities of another Spanish representation, as well as the refusal of permission to carry out the activities of Spanish and Canadian missions. In particular, were found in violation with clearance personnel files of staff, late submission of passport data on employees of these organizations on the use of old models in print documents. At first glance it seems that it is not too serious violations. But we believe that

any violation of those conditions and requirements that are formulated in the 654 judgement, is a serious violation. Once all this is stipulated in the document and therefore should certainly immaculately executed. This is the position we now take and will continue to take.

**-- Tell us about organizations that from the results of checks may lose the right to arrange the adoption of children from Russia.**

-- We have decided to inform our colleagues on the interdepartmental commission from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Justice that the representation of American Family Childrens and Eydzhensi, Ink. " did not inform us of the death of a Russian girl, and nearly a year has passed since the tragedy of the day. We think that our position on banning the activities of this organization will be approved and permission for its work on adoptions in Russia would be withdrawn.

-- Agency has been violated the requirement of immediate informing the Russian side on cases of deaths of children adopted. We believe that this is sufficient to cast doubt on the willingness of people working in this organization, to give us accurate information and be sufficiently sensitive to all sorts of situations that arise during the procedure of adoption. In addition, we conducted a check and discovered a number of other violations.

**-- On the part of any adoption organizations observed the largest number of violations?**

-- We have the complexity of the so-called independent adoptions, that is independent, without the help of foreign organizations. Of course, during the procedure for adoptions, adoptive parents tell us that they will comply with all requirements of Russian legislation. But as soon as the child is abroad, then through independent adoptions, we often face delays reporting on the lives of adopted children which should be sent to us after 5, 11, 23 and 36 months after the adoption came into force.

The reports are required to inform us about the development of the child, on the state of his health, on the conditions of his residence, on contacts with the nearest surroundings. To this must be accompanied by photographs, the conclusion of a social service.

**-- Organizations which countries have the most outstanding records to the Russian side?**

-- As of July 1, 2008 we have thousands of arrears of 2.1 records of the living conditions and upbringing of children adopted independently, without assistance of foreign organizations. Most adoptive parents from the United States - 838, France - 664, Spain - 323, Ireland - 95, Germany - and 72 from other countries - 132.

It is noteworthy that this information that we received from 67 Russian regions. If we have filed data from all 84 regions, then, perhaps, that number would have been even greater.

In doing so, with reports from accredited organizations have virtually no problem. If they arise, then quickly solved, because the organization understand that they risk being in the field of view and lose our permits.

**-- What is the Russian side in case of arrears?**

-- We appeal to the central authorities of the host side, in our diplomatic service, embassies and consular services to enable them to influence these debtors. If a child to adopt abroad, we must be sure that a child there, is at least not worse, and ideally better than he was in the orphanage.

**-- What's in this context the State?**

-- We do attempt to make changes to Russian legislation. The first part of our efforts is linked to

overseas candidates substitute parents receiving special training, special psychological testing. The second part is related to independent adoptions, which today is absolutely legitimate in accordance with Russian and international law, to make it more seriously regulated. However undergoing such training, such testing should be required not only for foreign but also Russian adoptive parents. The system of specialized agencies, which would be involved in the preparation of substitute parents and psychological testing, we have only just created. In the last 2-3 years we have service in 42 regions of Russia.

**-- Prior to the amendment of the law will the Russian Federation conclude bilateral treaty about adoptive parents of our children? What are the advantages of such agreements?**

-- Yes, for us it is the second path. The first - to make independent adoptions were tightly regulated, and the second - on the path of bilateral treaties. Advantages of agreements are as follows.

First, it prescribe that the adoption of a child can be carried out only with the assistance of responsible organizations (agencies), unless adopted relatives.

Secondly, parties to the treaty on a reciprocal basis may regulate the number of adoption organizations.

Thirdly, the treaty stipulates that candidates for the adoptive parents, must undergo mandatory training and testing. Thus the contract is above the laws of both countries. It has the force of a main document on which we focus.

And fourthly, in the event of termination of the organization responsibilities for the provision of records and tracing the fate of the child, a guarantee that it all will be fine, from the central authority of the host country. This is also stipulated in the contract.

And finally, in fifth, all questions about the placement of a child into another family will be solved only in agreement with the central authority of the country of origin of the Child (RF). For us, this is also very important. Order 654 set the ruling that such cases must notified to us immediately, but not all organizations are doing so, not to mention the line of independent adoptions.

If we go on this path and will continue to make contracts (agreements), then regardless of how the process will move forward to improve our legislation, this is real way to reduce abuses, unfair and attitude on the part of officials and independent adoptive parents. So this is an acceptable option of developing relations in this sphere between the two nations.

**-- Russia is preparing an agreement with Italy. At what stage is it now?**

-- We have entered the final phase. And the form and content of the contract has already been developed, and introduced the latest amendments. All ministries - the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Justice and MHSD - should be in agreement about the final text. After that we will submit it to the government.

**-- Which countries in the future, Russia plans to conclude bilateral agreements?**

-- We would like to make agreements with all countries where Russian children go to live. We discussed this topic with representatives of the Foreign Ministry, especially after the latest tragic case, in the Dima Yakovlev, and the MFA is prepared to help us on our diplomatic channels.

**-- Do you know of any overturned international adoptions with return of children to Russia?**

-- Over the past two years, this has not happened. But facts show transfer of children from one

family to another there. Of course, it is bad that the child be moved from one family to another. But for us it is confirmation that the social service organization acts responsibly in finding a new place of residence of the child and that if the child's situation arises that it is in a family which for some reason is not good, they are taking action on placing the child in another family.

**-- What are the most common reasons for the re-placement of kids?**

-- There are situations of incompatibility with the child's parents. That is, parents are not sufficiently trained to adapt and to socialize the child to life in a new environment. Sometimes parents are beginning to experience discomfort as their birth children are not compatible with the adopted children, there are conflict situations with which they are not coping well and were not that informed about it.

Secondly, most of the children - children are weighed down with history, they have problems with development, they do not always develop adequately. When familiar with the records, then you know that even those people who have been trained to the role of substitute parents are not quite ready for this step.

**-- Children are transferred from one family to another within the same country?**

-- Yes, usually within a single city, county. They are considering various options and choose a family for a child, but they, of course, are obliged to inform us about it. But there are cases where they informed us late, after the fact.

**-- Foreign adoptive parents more frequently and with greater number taking children with serious illnesses than Russia?**

-- Yes, we can say that they are adopting such children more frequently. Because in the U.S., for example, the State assumes free medical care such a child, the operation free of charge for the adoptive parent families. And furthermore, the state provides more support for the family of the child education. And of course when the situation is correlated with ill-health of our children, especially social orphans, whose parents are chronic alcoholics and drug addicts, homeless, then you know what is often expensive treatment. Russian adoptive parents would be glad to take the whole soul of this child, but they honestly evaluate the child's potential and understand that it may not be so huge. Foreign adoptive parents in this sense are more preferred position, and we know there is a lot of noble conduct on the part of foreign adoptive parents. Sometimes you know that if a child was left in our children's home, he could stay permanently disabled. A treatment abroad allows him to become a full-fledged man. Against this backdrop, even a rescue and derived trajectory of life on the fate of children is expensive.

**-- What is being done in Russia to support the family, legal guardians and other caregivers of a child with a serious illness?**

-- Many Russian regions adopt the laws which gives the family taking a disabled child a much greater support than the family with a healthy child. The case is a great social significance. This is very important.

**-- What form of family placements for orphans are today the most popular in Russia?**

-- If one looks at the top of all forms of family placements in our country in 2007, then we in the first place is state care (welfare) - 90.7 of thousands of children. The second - Fostering (in the last 3 years) - 20.9 of thousands of children. And at the last place - Adoption - 14 thousand children. Although adoption is the most preferred form of the Family Code. Adopting this year in Russia slightly less than in the past (nearly 14.5 thousand children), while domestic adoptions, more than twice the foreign (9.5 thousand and 4.5 thousand children respectively).

**-- How do you explain that the most preferred form of family for a child placement (adoption) in our country occupies the last place?**

-- We will carefully analyze and monitor the situation with adoptions. The child adopted by a family is entitled to the same rights and duties, as the children by blood. Furthermore, the degree of liability in the case of adoptions is more powerful than, for example, in a family.

Secondly, adoptive parents usually want to commit to the family of young children and almost always infants. There are very few infants on the data bank.

**-- Children are adopted at what age most often?**

-- Our most popular age group are children under three to five years. But few adopt children after seven years, or children who are taking ill, especially Russian adoptive parents.

**-- Over the past three years the number of foster families in Russia increased more than fivefold (from 4 to 21 thousand children). This is the result of deliberate government policy?**

-- Yes, at the state level we have purposefully taken the decision to support foster families. The family receives a lump sum for a child in the amount not less than 8 thousand rubles, monthly payments for the maintenance of the child - at least 4 thousand rubles, they receive as a salary. So we made a bid for an adoptive family as a professional family, which, with the support of the State assumes the duty to raise and educate the child, help him to successfully enter into adult life, in other words, in all senses undergo socialization. And the state has this professional family. The result is good? Without a doubt. Because in 2005 we had only 4 thousands, but in 2007 almost 21 thousand. Correct strategy has been built? After three years we can say that correctly.

**-- In recent years, the country's declining number of children brought up in orphanages, respectively decreasing the number of institutions for orphans. Is it a goal for the Ministry to close all orphanages in the country?**

-- In no case. We are not trying to do this, because there are children who do not want to leave the (orphanage) school, especially teenagers after 12 years, and there are the very sick, which are unlikely to leave. Our concern is to create decent conditions for these children and close to maximum terms in a good family. And this is important in our work and strategic direction.

Again, we have no goal to attack all the orphanage and boarding institutions to make them close. We have a full understanding that they will always exist. Not all child orphanages are comfortable - this is true. But there are orphanages, where there are very good teams. There are cases where children are already in the institutions of learning, but in their vacation return to visit their children's homes as to their homes. Although they, at least, do not stay there, but they come to visit, because the strong threads that bind them, persist for life.

**-- Is not remain unemployed orphanage, where children from all agencies investigate their family?**

-- When a team is released, many intelligent leaders in the subjects moving towards the creation on the basis of these collectives of the most professional services, which we talked about - they are preparing substitute parents. In this situation, people who are not called upon to do so professionally, leave. And those who feel called to professionally and in human terms, would continue, though it is no longer a children's home, and professional service to continue to work with the family, because it is their vocation. And in this sense we are seeing our work. We are helping these services and develop guidelines for them.

According to the Ministry, in 2007 the number of students of educational institutions for orphans

declined by 14.5 thousand people over 2006 and amounted to nearly 103.3 thousand people. Consequently, fewer orphanage and boarding schools, until 1688 (2006 - 1770 institutions).

By 2010, according to projections of the executive bodies of subjects of Russian Federation, through the development of family forms of child devices, the number of institutions for orphans and raise them in the planned cut in 1.3-fold: the number of institutions - at 400, the number of children in them -some by 35 thousand people.