

British Association for Adoption & Fostering

Head Office Skyline House, 200 Union Street, London SE1 0LX

Tel 020 7593 2000 **Fax** 020 7593 2001

Email mail@baaf.org.uk **Website** www.baaf.org.uk



22nd June 2005

Lord Andrew Adonis
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Schools
Department for Education and Skills
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
Westminster
London SW1P 3BT

Dear Lord Adonis

RE: Children and Adoption Bill

Given the imminent Second Reading of this Bill on 29th June, we are writing jointly to share with you our serious concerns about provisions in this Bill which introduce a fee for processing intercountry applications at the DfES. This part of the Bill was not included in the draft Bill on which consultation responses were invited and which was considered by the joint committee - this lack of transparency and unwillingness to consider the implications of new measures are most unfortunate.

We have welcomed of course and supported the need for a comprehensive intercountry adoption system which will safeguard children. However, we also understood that the government intended to provide an equivalent and equitable service in relation to intercountry adoption and that there would not be a two tier service. What is critically important is that all adoptions are in line with the Hague Convention and the UN Convention on the Rights of the child. Statistically, there are a tiny number of children adopted from other countries into the UK compared to the rest of Europe. While not every signatory to this letter would necessarily agree about the extent to which intercountry adoption should be promoted, we would all support the promotion of good practice in intercountry adoption and an equitable framework which facilitates this, as, for a small number of children, it presents the only opportunity for safe and secure family life. For some children, adoption by relatives in this country is the best way to secure their future and the proposals in this bill are likely to prove an obstacle to many such adoptions.

We believe any additional financial burden on intercountry adopters may run the risk of a minority seeking to circumvent procedures thereby putting some children at risk. We are concerned that the administrative costs in providing any sort of means testing system would significantly reduce any potential gains and we do not think this is helpful. Given this government's commitment to address poverty issues world wide, the imposition of this particular charging mechanism seems quite inappropriate.

Of course, you will also be aware that there are current serious concerns about the delays experienced in the processing of applications by the DfES and the lack of coherent quality standards about this. In addition we are aware that in some parts of the country local authorities do not comply with their statutory responsibility to assess intercountry adopters and in others the wait for an assessment is over two years, even where there is a named child. These proposals cannot be considered in isolation from the current consultation progressing on the draft regulations on prescribed fees which could also impose considerable additional

President Sir Edward Cazalet **Chair** Anthony Douglas **Chief Executive** Felicity Collier

Registered as British Association for Adoption and Fostering **Registered Office** Skyline House, 200 Union Street, London SE1 0LX

A Company Limited by Guarantee Registered Number 1379092 Registered Charity 275689

charges on intercountry adopters. Of particular concern to us would be any element of charge that applies to the “welfare supervision” of children that have come into this country.

We recognise the short timescale but we would very much welcome the opportunity to meet with you and to discuss these concerns further. We are currently working on a briefing to help inform debate on the Bill.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Felicity Collier, Chief Executive
British Association for Adoption and Fostering

Gill Haworth, Director
Intercountry Adoption Centre

Naomi Angell,
Legal advisor to the Intercountry Adoption Centre

Andrew Gibbons, Chairman
Association for Families who have Adopted from Abroad (AFAA)

Stevan Whitehead, Chair
Overseas Adoption Support and Information Service (OASIS)

Jonathan Pearce, Director
Adoption UK