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International Parental Child Abduction and Human Trafficking In The Western Hemisphere

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Published: November 29th, 2010

ABSTRACT

International Parental Child Abduction and Human Trafficking Prevention Report In Correspondence To The Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative And Other Related Abduction Prevention Challenges Faced By The United States And Its Neighboring Countries.

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Overview

Since beginning our work together on child abduction prevention we have remained actively involved in advocacy and education in this area. Recently our research has led us to uncover significant border control security vulnerabilities that we believe are currently being utilized in illegally transporting children across U.S. borders in both incoming and outgoing parental abduction cases as well as being capitalized by smugglers who trade in human life.

Our findings are a cause of great concern.

The purpose of the following report is to bring these facts to the forefront of targeted and victimized parents of international parental child abduction, activists involved in the war against human trafficking, leaders of non-governmental agencies, lawyers practicing family or human rights law, all levels of law enforcement, the judiciary responsible for our nation's children, our local, state and federal legislative policymakers, and all government agencies responsible with oversight as they are related to cross-border child abduction and human trafficking. It is our hope that our findings will cause both short and long-term preventative steps and solutions to be taken at all necessary levels so that we may work together to further protect our nation's children. To put it mildly, we have a serious, growing, and immeasurable problem on our hands, and its far-reaching tentacles lash out at society's greatest resource: our children.

Our initial research evolved around the question *“How are children illegally abducted into and out of the United States and our adjacent neighboring countries despite preventive measures that may be in place either by court order or by preventive laws and programs?”*

The answers to this question varies and includes, but is not limited to a lack of or failure to uphold child abduction prevention laws, inept courts and uneducated or naïve judges who fail to consider abduction risk or fail to carry out the intent of the laws they oversee in order to protect the welfare of a child, carefully-orchestrated abduction plans conceived well in advance by an abducting parent or trafficker, or flaws in the legal system that enable would-be abductors to capitalize on various loopholes so that they may steal a child across international borders. Many of these issues have previously been well documented. Thus, we directed our investigation toward the possibility of whether there are any existing loopholes in present law. Specifically, do opportunities presently exist that enable abductors and traffickers to steal and transport children despite our government's legal efforts to prevent cross-border child stealing from occurring?

Dual Citizenship

Our conclusions acknowledge the existence of cross-border child abduction via individuals who possess dual-citizenship, which enables them to possess foreign passports. Often, the children of these individuals possess dual nationality as well and

may be issued a passport by another country. The Department of State's Office of Children's Issues alerts parents to the possibility that *"Your child might also be a citizen of another country (dual nationality),"* and offers the following information on the subject of dual nationality. *"The concept of dual nationality means that a person is a citizen of two countries at the same time. Each country has its own citizenship laws based on its own policy. Individuals may have dual nationality by automatic operation of different laws rather than by choice. For example, a child born in a foreign country to U.S. citizen parents may be both a U.S. citizen and a citizen of the country of birth."* Conversely, a child born in the U.S. to a citizen of another country may automatically acquire citizenship of that country or in some cases the parent may apply for the child to be granted citizenship.

How Are Children Illegally Abducted Into And Out Of The United States

Security flaws that can lead to our children becoming victimized include, but are not limited to the following:

1. Failures by courts and judges to properly assess abduction risk and attach court orders that would preempt international child stealing; and,
2. Failure to create or uphold present child abduction prevention laws or other laws created to protect our children's safety; and,
3. Identity and travel documentation fraud; and,
4. A lack of uniform requirements for travel documentation when departing or entering the U.S.; and,
5. The ability under present law to easily illegally transport children under age 16 across borders during land and sea travel; and,
6. Human error during verification of travel documents by CBP at a point-of-entry or departure; and,
7. Failures by law enforcement to act expeditiously to a potential abduction threat; and,
8. Inefficient communication and data sharing between government agencies responsible to assist in preventing or resolving an international child abduction case; and,
9. The deficiency by our federal government to create and interlink a children's travel alert, travel restriction data base consisting of real-time family court decisions at the state level with all U.S. border control agencies and transport companies similar to capabilities available through the Prevent Departure Program; and,

10. A lack of or outdated or underutilized state or federal laws and programs that fail to prevent the abduction of a child and in fact may enable an abduction to occur.

Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI)

Our research drew us to focus on the *Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative* (WHTI).

Under the *Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004*, the WHTI was designed to strengthen border security and is a joint Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Department of State (DOS) plan that is carried out in part by the U.S. Customs Border Protection Agency (CBP). The intent of the initiative is to further protect and strengthen our nation's borders by requiring all travelers to and from Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean and Bermuda to present a WHTI compliant document that establishes identity and citizenship.

During the course of our investigation it became apparent that there is limited available research or data concerning international parental child abduction or human trafficking as it relates to travel document requirements for children crossing into contiguous countries by land or sea under WHTI policy. However, what is certain is that child abductions and human trafficking to our bordering nations of Mexico and Canada represent a great number of 'reported' international abductions and missing person cases originating from the United States. Additionally, we believe that a vast majority of 'unreported' child abduction cases are associated with Mexico and Canada. Our findings are cause for grave concern. It is clear that due to the varying travel documentation requirements for land and sea travel that there exist substantial loopholes in U.S. law that allow would-be abductors or traffickers to capitalize on the porous travel documentation requirements for children.

Today, very serious security gaps exist directly related to WHTI, especially as it pertains to a child's travel document requirements. These stunning flaws and loopholes provide substantial opportunity for illegal cross-border family or stranger child abductions and human trafficking to occur to and from the United States.

Hague Convention Compliance Report On International Child Abduction

Congress mandates that under *Public Law 105-277, Section 2803* the Department of States Office of Children's Issues (OCI) publish an annual report which indicates the effectiveness of securing the return of children whom have been unlawfully removed from their home country and for whom an application under the 1980 *Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction* has been filed. The publication is titled *Report on Compliance with the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction*.

Statistics from the two most current annual reports that are dated April 2009 and April 2010 demonstrate abduction crimes against children in the United States and abroad are substantially on the rise. Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs, Janice L.

Jacobs reports that during fiscal year 2009, the Office of Children's Issues (OCI) experienced a significant increase in the number of reported international parental kidnapping cases. The 2010 report indicates that we can anticipate the current trends previously seen with respect to the increase in international parental child abductions to continue. In fact, the number of International Parental Child Abduction (IPCA) cases in which a Hague application has been filed has nearly doubled since fiscal year 2006 from 564 to 1,135 cases in fiscal year 2009.

The 2009 report utilized data that was collected during the period from October 1, 2007 through September 30, 2008 and is referred to as fiscal year (FY) 2008. This report reflects that 1,082 new cases were filed involving 1,615 children. During the study year, the U.S. was successful in the return of only 361 children.

The 2010 report covers the time period from October 1, 2008 through September 30, 2009 that is referred to as FY 2009. During FY 2009 1,135 new applications were received for assistance in an attempt to facilitate the return of 1,621 children who were wrongfully removed from the United States. Sadly, during FY 2009 the U.S. was successful in the return of only 436 children. The report does not indicate during which FY year a returned child was abducted.

<u>REPORT YEAR</u>	<u>FISCAL YEAR</u>	<u>CASES</u>	<u>TOTAL CHILDREN</u>	<u>TOTAL CHILDREN RETURNED</u>
2010	2009	1,135	1,621	436
2009	2008	1,082	1,615	361
2008	2007	575	821	341

Now consider if the international child abduction growth rate continues at an average of 20% per year for the next ten years. This means that the projected number of 'reported' U.S. children-citizens that will be internationally abducted in the year 2020 would be 9,647. To put this into perspective, this loss would be the equivalent of 241 school buses carrying 40 children each suddenly disappearing.

Additionally, if we add the total number of 'reported' international child abductions that have occurred from 2007 and add the forecasted number of abductions anticipated to occur using a 20% growth rate, then a total of 53,285 children will have been 'reported' as internationally abducted from 2007 through 2020. To put this into perspective, this would be the equivalent of an entire major league baseball stadium filled with children simply vanishing.

As remarkably disturbing as these actual and projected numbers are, these forecasted statistics do not project the large and growing number of 'unreported' cases of international parental child abduction cases. Furthermore, they do not represent any

international abductions related to stranger abductions and human trafficking, which we anticipate to be substantial.

Recovery Of Internationally Abducted Children

It is important to include that as time passes, it becomes substantially more difficult to recover an abducted child. This is especially true in light of the fact that the *Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction* contains under *Article 12* a policy that could allow a judge to order for the criminally abducted child to remain in the country they were stolen to if after one year the child is considered to have settled into their new environment and it is believed that removing the child would be detrimental. As you may well imagine, there are numerous difficulties in locating and negotiating the return of a child who has been internationally abducted. The likelihood of this type of case being resolved as expeditiously as one year is slim and essentially the chasing parent may be left to negotiate on his/her own after one year has passed. Undeniably, time is not a child or a chasing parent's friend.

Make no mistake, nearly every abducting parent who is required to defend their criminal action in the international Hague courts will use every conceivable stall tactic as well as every possible defense strategy available to them including but not limited to false allegations, slander and defamation of character. In applicable cases the child may not be returned due to provisions under *Article 13* of the Hague Convention. *Article 13* of the Hague Convention allows for the court overseeing a Hague case to allow for a child to remain with the abducting parent in the receiving country if the court determines that a return order would cause grave risk and harm to the child. Thus, child-abductors attempting to sanction their criminal act of international child-stealing will typically make horrendous false allegations against the left behind parent in order to not only sanction their criminal behavior but to also avoid prosecution for kidnapping under the federal *International Parental Kidnapping Crimes Act*, the federal *Parental Kidnapping Prevention Act*, the federal *Fugitive Felon Act* and various other federal or state criminal laws where applicable.

Fortunately society has begun to take notice of the tragedies related to international child abduction and human trafficking. A more educated judiciary continues to evolve and new abduction preventive laws have been implemented to prevent child abduction and human trafficking. We have made substantial strides in social and judiciary awareness, and in certain states created new child abduction prevention laws. However, the fact is that the system in place today that was created to protect our children and their targeted parents from the nightmare of international child abduction does not work efficiently and needs to be substantially overhauled. At present, our judiciary, law enforcement, policymakers and the legislation they oversee, and the government agencies responsible for oversight fall significantly short from meeting the necessary needs of targeted children and parents. We must do substantially better at all levels of abduction prevention and child reunification.

On August 31, 2009 a speech titled *Child Abductions: Globally, Nationally and Along the U.S./Mexico Border* was given by Ernie Allen, President and CEO of the *National Center for Missing and Exploited Children* and *International Centre for Missing & Exploited Children*. Mr. Allen states, "The problem of missing, abducted, trafficked and sexually exploited children is large, growing, under-recognized and under-reported." On November 16, 2010 Mr. Allen delivered the keynote address at the National Amber Alert Symposium. During his speech he revealed, "Children are the leading victims of violent and personal crimes in this country, victimized at a rate twice as high as the general population." Continuing he stated, "Children are the single most victimized segment of our population. Even with all of the progress we have made, most Americans still don't understand that basic fact. According to Justice Department research, more than 2,000 children will be reported missing in the United States today!" Additionally, Mr. Allen stated, "The numbers are staggering. The tragedies continue and too many children do not make it home."

One of the questions we must ask ourselves in connection to such statements is *How are our children disappearing?*

In relationship to parental child abduction cases, we acknowledge the failures of courts to act cautiously and prudently in preventing a potential abduction. There is no question that judges and the courts they oversee need to become better informed, and that more education is desperately needed to influence a judge's decision making when it comes to protecting the welfare of a child. The existence of serious foul play and deceit by an abducting parent who steals a child across international borders without the targeted parents anticipation or knowledge is a serious concern. And we acknowledge extreme circumstances when a child is removed from the United States despite court orders because both the child and the abducting parent have dual citizenship and both possess a primary or secondary passport issued by the abducting parent's country of origin. This circumstance renders programs such as the United States *Children's Passport Issuance Alert Program* (CPIAP) or *Prevent Departure Program* (PDP) useless.

This report focuses on the substantial loopholes available to would-be abductors and traffickers that presently enable them to commit their egregious crimes despite great efforts to prevent cross-border abduction. We believe there is a direct correlation between the high number of successful child abductions to our neighboring countries and the legal loopholes that allow minimum travel documentation requirements for children traveling by land or by sea under WHTI policy.

Documentary Requirements For Children Traveling Internationally

The WHTI requirements for air travel took effect on January 23, 2007. According to U.S. Customs Border Protection, "All U.S. citizens and non-immigrant aliens from Canada, Bermuda, and Mexico departing from or entering the United States from within the Western Hemisphere at air ports-of-entry are required to present a valid passport (or

NEXUS card, if utilizing a NEXUS kiosk when departing from a designated Canadian airport)." We believe that this stringent mandate for verifiable documentary identification prior to air travel has significantly reduced the ability to unlawfully remove a child from the United States.

Additionally, the U.S. increased the security of its child citizens when on February 1, 2008 new requirements under *Public Law 106-113, Section 236* took effect requiring the permission of both parents prior to the issuance of a U.S. passport for children under the age of 16. According to the Department of State Office Of Children's Issues, "*U.S. law requires the signature of both parents, or the child's legal guardians, prior to issuance of a U.S. passport to children under the age of 16. Generally, to obtain a U.S. passport for a child under the age of 16, both parents (or the child's legal guardians) must execute the child's passport application and provide documentary evidence demonstrating that they are the parents or guardians. If this cannot be done, the person executing the passport application must provide documentary evidence that he or she has sole custody of the child, has the consent of the other parent to the issuance of the passport, or is acting in place of the parents and has the consent of both parents (or of a parent/legal guardian with sole custody over the child to the issuance of the passport).*"

Due to the implementation of these new requirements, the ability to unlawfully transport children that do not possess dual citizenship across borders has become increasingly difficult. The two-parent signature necessary for a minor child's U.S. passport issuance has strengthened our border security and reduced the ability to present incomplete or fraudulent documentation in order to travel with a child across international borders. Thankfully, our child citizens are better protected than they were just a few years ago.

The two-parent signature requirement necessary for a U.S. Passport to be issued for a child has greatly reduced the opportunity that a passport will be issued without another parent's knowledge or consent. Unfortunately, documentation fraud is still very difficult to detect and remains a severe threat to our nation's children, especially if initiated by parental forgery. Tragically, for many targeted-parent victims of international parental child abduction this type of fraud is common. Unquestionably, it is critical that precautionary steps continue to be taken before issuing passports to children due to substantial evidence of documentation fraud.

Additionally, and to our great concern, it appears to be relatively easy to obtain fraudulent or falsified identification or residency documentation.

Tere Silva, resident agent in charge of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Office of Professional Responsibility (OPR) in San Juan, Puerto Rico, said in a statement issued on November 17th, 2010, "*Among the various schemes and artifices being used by some unscrupulous persons are offers to provide immigration services, including ways to avoid the established channels for adjusting one's immigration status, offers to provide false and forged identity documents, even threats and false impersonation of immigration officials.*"

On November 19th, 2010 Daniel Lane, assistant special agent in charge of ICE Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) in Sacramento, California stated, *"Targeting those responsible for making and selling fraudulent documents is an enforcement priority for ICE HSI. Anyone who knowingly and indiscriminately sells phony identity cards is putting the security of our communities and even our country at risk. Documents like this could potentially be used by dangerous criminals and others seeking to obscure their identities and mask their motives."* Agent Lane's comments came after ICE arrested four individuals for running a highly sophisticated forged document factory that included creating fraudulent California drivers licenses, permanent resident cards (Green Cards), U.S. birth certificates and other documents capable of removing a child from the U.S. under the WHTI.

In response to the rise of illegal entry and exodus to the United States, the implementation of WHTI policy has effectively narrowed the types of documents that are acceptable in proving identity and citizenship. Although this change is a critical step towards meeting the challenge of securing our borders there still remain significant security challenges due to certain allowable exemptions. Unfortunately, when it comes to cross border travel by children being transported by land or sea, numerous security defects exist. Unquestionably, individuals or organizations with intent to breach the law have exploited these policy flaws. Our nation's children as well as children from other countries are suffering either as defenseless victims of international parental child abduction or as helpless slaves taken into the world of human trafficking, where the worst types of crimes against humanity are the norm.

As a nation concerned with our children's safety and welfare, it is unacceptable that large gaps in security protocol exist in our nation's international travel document requirements for children traveling in the Western Hemisphere. In the 2009, annual *Report on Compliance with the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction*, Janice L. Jacobs, Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs writes, *"Unfortunately, current trends reflect a steady increase in the number of international parental child abduction cases and highlight the urgency of redoubling efforts to promote compliance with Convention obligations and encourage additional nations to join the Convention."* She also writes, *"Very few options exist for parents and children who are victims of parental child abduction."* In the 2010 annual report Ms. Jacobs continues to voice concerns over the increasing numbers of our child-citizens who have been wrongfully removed or wrongfully detained.

Assistant Secretary of State of Consular Affairs Jacobs concern about the growing rate of international parental child abduction (IPCA) is alarming, yet our adjacent borders remain relatively open for those with the knowledge on how to circumvent border security protocol. Make no mistake, nearly every IPCA case is well thought out and planned.

Human Trafficking

The buying and selling of humans is the second largest criminal activity in the world. In the U.S., this problem is much more severe than commonly discussed. Of particular concern is that it is estimated that over 70% of all humans trafficked into the U.S. originate from Latin America: countries such as Mexico, Honduras, and El Salvador are well-known supply sources for human cargo.

A significant number of these enslaved are young teenagers between 13 and 15 years old who originate from poverty-stricken communities, and who are lured into the dark world of slavery due to false promises of legitimate jobs and a better life in America. What awaits them is an inhuman slave world filled with torture, violence, and threats of death to family members they left behind if they ever attempt to flee their imprisoned ‘cantinas’ – prison-like brothels where they are never allowed to leave. Tragically, sure death awaits those imprisoned into this inferno: they are either murdered, die of drug overdose, or die of disease and infection.

One of the grave concerns we must ask is *How are these individual doomed to enter the awaiting world of human slavery trafficked into the United States from Latin America and crossing our border?*

It is apparent that the majority of human cargo entering our borders due so illegally. Though limited data is available, sound reasoning leads us to anticipate that this number is substantial.

Due to limited border documentation requirements under WHTI policy, particularly for minors traveling, there is substantial concern that human traffickers are currently using this loophole in order to move their young human cargo into the United States from Mexico and Caribbean island-nations.

The world of human trafficking and slavery is very real. According to author of *Free The Slaves*, Kevin Bale, there are nearly 27 million people across the world caught in modern-day slavery. The United States Department of State *Trafficking In Persons Report* (TIP Report) estimates this number to be between 4 million and 27 million individuals. Additionally, the Department of State estimates that there are over 800,000 individuals each year being transported across international borders. And according to their 2005 report titled *Facts About Child Sex Tourism*, there were over 1 million children exploited by the global commercial sex trade every year. All of these numbers continue to increase. Human trafficking is a dark world without any peer and most organizations involved in human trafficking and slavery are highly sophisticated.

Yet our borders remain relatively unencumbered for children traveling abroad in the Western Hemisphere.

U.S. Passport Requirements For International Travel

For U.S. Citizens, a Federal Statute mandates that any citizen of the U.S. must possess a valid U.S. passport to depart from or enter the U.S. Following is the text of *Federal Statute 8 U.S.C. 1185 (b)*.

(b) Citizens Except as otherwise provided by the President and subject to such limitations and exceptions as the President may authorize and prescribe, it shall be unlawful for any citizen of the United States to depart from or enter, or attempt to depart from or enter, the United States unless he bears a valid United States passport.

When WHTI requirements for land and sea became effective on June 1, 2009 exceptions to the Federal Statute passport requirement were allowed. The new regulation states that U.S. citizens and citizens of Canada, Bermuda and Mexico may present a passport or other WHTI-compliant documents when entering or departing the United States at sea or land ports-of-entry from within the Western Hemisphere.

Due to exceptions to the passport requirement, our research has concluded there exists distinct areas of vulnerability at the border for our children.

Fraudulent Documentation

The presentation of fraudulent documents at border points has long existed and is well illustrated in the publication of *Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) Land and Sea Final Rule*" that was released March 27, 2008 by the Department of Homeland Security. It was reported that CBP officers had intercepted over 129,000 fraudulent documents since January 2005 from individuals trying to cross the border over an approximate 3 ½ year period. This is a substantial number; however, we must ask ourselves how many fraudulent documents were never uncovered and successfully used?

To better demonstrate the severity of this problem we take note of a scenario that occurred several years ago in Texas and was reported by the Department of Immigration and Naturalization Services. A woman acting as a lay-midwife was charged and convicted with fraudulently filing and obtaining over 3,400 United States birth certificate claims over a ten year period: almost one American birth certificate a day was fraudulently obtained and sold on the black market over a decade by one woman alone. This individual was one of eleven individuals convicted of filing and obtaining false birth certificates that were sold on the black market in Texas during a federal investigation. Of immense concern to us is that WHTI allows a child to cross international borders by land or sea and in lieu of a passport an original or copy of a birth certificate may be presented.

As noted in language of the Federal Statute above, limitations and exceptions do exist. According to CBP passport exceptions exist when traveling with U.S. or Canadian citizen infants and children. Of grave concern are the deficiencies that could be utilized in the cross border unlawful removal by land or sea of at risk children. If traveling by air

everyone, even infants require a passport. However, WHTI allows that U.S. and Canadian citizen children “*will not require passports for travel by land or sea when the June 1, 2009 rule goes into effect requiring all land and sea travelers to have a passport. Children under the age of 15 will have a blanket exemption from this requirement – although they will be required to present a copy of a birth certificate and, if not traveling with both parents, a consent letter from the other parent(s).*”

We are especially concerned about the ability to falsify travel documentation for children. The capability to easily present travel documentation without another parent's consent or to falsify travel documents for children in cases where a passport is not required appears relatively easy. The fact that simply a birth certificate or worse, a “copy” of a birth certificate and a letter of permission with no documentation to verify its validity, is sufficient to cross international borders is a serious security concern. And although it is also recommended that a parent or guardian possess a letter of consent from the absent parent(s) this may or may not be required or requested. We must also consider that there is no way to verify the validity of a parental consent letter.

These concerns should sound an alarm bell directed at courts presiding over child custody cases where there is concern for potential international parental child abduction. Peter Thomas Senese, the co-writer of this report wrote in *Chasing The Cyclone*, “*I know first-hand of several international parental child abduction cases where a false international travel consent letter was either fraudulently produced or never produced by the other parent in order for that abducting parent to depart from Canada into the United States or from the United States into Canada. The court’s orders were not followed, as is the case with all abducting parents. More troubling is the fact that in each of these cases, none of the necessary consent letters were ever checked by either countries border patrol or immigration agencies. This is absurd, particularly when knowing many of these consent to travel letters were not notarized and not original documents. It must be a requirement on both sides of the border for all land and sea travelers regardless of age to use a passport, which is the policy in place for air travel.*”

When we consider the growing rate of international abduction here in the U.S. and abroad, there is a very real concern that our borders are used not only as a final destination for an abducting parent or trafficker, but as the launching point for an abductor to travel to their intended final destination. Although most countries recognize that documentation fraud is a severe concern it is clear that the minimization of travel document requirements needed for a minor to travel across our borders enables would-be abductors to criminally abduct a child. For example, if a would-be abductor traveling by land from the U.S. to Canada has in their possession *any* child’s original or ‘a copy’ of a birth certificate and a falsified consent to travel letter, they have the capability to internationally abduct any child from the U.S.

Realistically, all a potential abductor may need is a copy of a birth certificate. Although it is recommended that children traveling alone or with one parent possess a consent letter from any absent parents this is not a requirement. In reference to the birth certificate

requirement, many parents obtain several copies of a child's birth certificate: it is not as if you are allowed only one copy such as a U.S. Passport. Unquestionably, if all cross-border travel for children of all ages does not include the much more secure and controllable use of a passport, then abducting parents and human traffickers will still be capable of abducting children.

The required travel document for an infant under age one who is traveling by land or sea between the U.S. and Canada is alarming. The CBP states that *"If you have not yet received a birth certificate for a U.S. or Canadian citizen infant, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) will accept either the birth record issued by the hospital or a letter on hospital letterhead providing details of the birth, including the name of the child, time and place of birth, and parents names. Birth certificates should be used for children over 1 year old."* Once again, the ease of fraudulently creating this type of "document" exists and a child could easily be smuggled across international borders.

Contiguous Countries – Mexico and Canada

Contiguous and adjacent countries seem to allow for the possibility of additional serious security breaches that need to be immediately resolved. While WHTI appears to remedy much of the ability to present fraudulent documentation at the border, it does allow for certain exceptions to the rule.

CBP reports this security vulnerability for children when it states, *"U.S. and Canadian citizen children under age 16 arriving by land or sea from a contiguous territory may present an original or copy of his or her birth certificate, a Consular Report of Birth Abroad, a Naturalization Certificate, or a Canadian Citizenship Card."* Contiguous territories are defined as countries sharing a common boundary with the United States. Canada and Mexico are both contiguous to the U.S.

In regards to outgoing cross-border abductions to Mexico (a contiguous country), the U.S. Department of State (DOS) reports *"Mexico is the destination country of the greatest number of children abducted from the United States by a parent."* Additionally, *"65% of all outgoing international parental abductions from the United States to Hague Convention countries are to Mexico, and that 41% of all incoming international parental abductions to the United States are from Mexico."* It is also important to note that according to the DOS, *"Since March 1, 2010, all U.S. citizens – including children – have been required to present a valid passport or passport card for travel beyond the "border zone" into the interior of Mexico. The "border zone" is generally defined as an area within 20 to 30 kilometers of the border with the U.S., depending on the location."* Concerns arise when you consider that entry into Mexico is allowed without a passport if a representation is made that you intend to remain within the designated "border zone".

Although Mexico acceded to The Hague Convention on June 20, 1991 and entered into force with the U.S. on October 1, 1991, Mexico has consistently been labeled non-compliant with the Convention. The 2010 Hague Compliance Report states that for fiscal

year 2009 there were 474 children involved in new outgoing (from the U.S. to Mexico) Hague applications. The 2009 Hague Compliance Report states there were 533 children abducted to Mexico, representing a 67% increase of reported abduction cases from 2007 (320 cases). The 'reported' cases do not include the immeasurable anticipated 'unreported' cases of parental child abduction occurring between the United States and Mexico previously discussed in *Crisis In America: International Parental Child Abduction Today (2010)*. Mexico's non-compliance with the Hague Convention is unquestionably appalling; however, the suffering and danger that must be endured by the thousands of abducted U.S. child-citizens stolen from their American homes to Mexico, nor the pain of their chasing parents left behind in the wake of the criminal act of child-stealing will never be fully understood by others unless it is experienced first-hand.

More insight should perhaps be shared on Mexico's decade-long atrocities against children and their consistent and ongoing failures to follow international laws pertaining to the world's children and their safety. The U.S. Department of State's annual compliance report has documented Mexico's history of non-compliance over the past decade. A Texas courts made a landmark decision when it went so far to find Mexico's legal system ineffective and lacking legal mechanisms for the immediate and effective enforcement of child custody orders. The court stated that Mexico posed a risk to children's physical health and safety due to human rights violations committed against children, including child labor and a lack of child abduction laws. This ruling was not rendered without insight and reason: in fact the U.S. Department of State, who has consistently posted travel warnings to U.S. citizens traveling to Mexico, recently issued a warning to authorize the departure of children dependents of U.S. government personnel in U.S. consulates and offer financial assistance to relocating families.

Nearly every year since The Hague Compliance Report was ordered to be prepared for Congress the DOS has sited that one of the gravest challenges in having a U.S. child-citizen stolen to Mexico is Mexico's inability to locate abducted children. This problem remains severe today despite Mexico's Central Authority claims that there has been slight improvement. Maura Harty, Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs for the U.S. Department of State previously commented, "*Among the underlying causes of Mexico's poor performance overall under the Hague Convention appear to be a woefully understaffed and underfunded Central Authority in the Foreign Ministry; a judiciary unfamiliar with, and not infrequently hostile to, the Convention; and law enforcement and court authorities unable to locate children even in cases in which we and the left-behind parents can provide exact addresses. In general, Mexico has only partially implemented the Hague Abduction Convention into its legal, administrative and law enforcement systems.*"

Our concern regarding Mexico is magnified due to this nation's poor record to stop human slavery.

In a written statement made in the U.S. Department of State's Trafficking in Persons Report in June 2009, "*Mexico is a large source, transit, and destination country for*

persons trafficked for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation and forced labor. Groups considered most vulnerable to human trafficking in Mexico include women and children, indigenous persons, and undocumented migrants. A significant number of Mexican women, girls, and boys are trafficked within the country for commercial sexual exploitation, lured by false job offers from poor rural regions to urban, border, and tourist areas. According to the government, more than 20,000 Mexican children are victims of sex trafficking every year, especially in tourist and border areas."

Additionally, Anne Keehn, the 2010 Zimmerman Fellow recipient of the world renown human rights and anti-slavery advocacy group 'Free the Slaves' recently stated, *"Unfortunately, [Mexico's President] Calderón's attack on drug cartels has left few resources to combat human trafficking. Mexico has tried to address the issue through legal changes to combat trafficking as recently as 2007, when 'federal legislation to prohibit all forms of drug trafficking' was passed. Nonetheless, according to the U.S. Department of State's Trafficking of Persons Report 2010, 'some local officials tolerate and are sometimes complicit in trafficking, impeding the implementation of anti-trafficking statutes.'"*

Due to the overall consensus of the significant dangers related to child abduction, exit controls for U.S. citizens departing the U.S. through all modes of travel need to be immediately implemented. If passports were required for all travelers to travel abroad, it is reasonable to believe there would be a significant reduction in the number of international parental child abductions and children missing due to human trafficking.

Under the present travel requirements, children in specific circumstances may be transported across borders without a passport. We believe this security deficiency has allowed hundreds if not thousands of defenseless children to be transported out of the country.

Due to the circumstances stated above and further disturbing information provided in this report, it is imperative that we attempt to hinder the possibility of illegal passage of children into Mexico due to the non-compliance exhibited in areas of law enforcement and judicial performance and the myriad of difficulties encountered in regards to a return application.

International Child Abduction Statistics

We must also consider the incoming cases of children that are consistently illegally transported into the U.S. The 2010 Hague Compliance Report indicates that 75 new Hague return applications were filed that represent 120 children that crossed from Mexico into the U.S. in violation of law. One can surmise that the security vulnerability that exists for outgoing cases could also be utilized in the illegal transport of children in incoming cases.

Cross-border abductions between the U.S. and Canada (a contiguous country) are also reported in the 2010 Hague Compliance Report. It indicates that there were 74 new outgoing cases involving 104 children and 29 new incoming cases representing 39 children. These are only cases in which a Hague application was filed and it should be noted that the number of Hague applications in no way accurately represents the actual number of children abducted in either incoming or outgoing cases. In statistical data compiled by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police there were over 60,000 children reported missing annually from Canada each study year between 1998 and 2007.

Within the U.S. the most recent *National Incidence Study of Missing, Abducted, Runaway and Thrownaway Children* (NISMART-2), reports that of the 203,900 children that are estimated to be parentally abducted annually in the U.S. that only 28% (56,500) of these abductions were reported to law enforcement. Additionally, the NISMART 2 statistical data is certainly outdated as it was compiled with information from cases studied that were concentrated in 1999. These facts lead us to surmise that we have an incalculable number of children abducted annually.

Adjacent Island-Nations

Currently, according to CBP "closed loop" travel to adjacent islands allows for the same documentary exceptions under WHTI, as do contiguous countries. Specifically, "Travelers on "closed loop" voyages are NOT subject to the same documentary requirements for entry to the United States as other travelers."

The CBP website indicates at least thirty-seven countries currently meet this definition. Adjacent islands are defined by statutes and regulation, specifically the Immigration and Nationality Act § 101(b)(5) and 8 Code of Federal Regulations §286.1. CBP reports that adjacent islands to the U.S. are: "*Anguilla, Antigua, Aruba, Bahamas, Barbados, Barbuda, Bermuda, Bonfire, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Cuba, Curacao, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guadeloupe, Haiti, Jamaica, Marie-Galantine, Martinique, Miquelon, Montserrat, Saba, Saint Barthelemy, Saint Christopher, Saint Eustatius, Saint Kitts-Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Maarten, Saint Martin, Saint Pierre, Saint Vincent and Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos Islands, and other British, French and Netherlands territory or possessions bordering on the Caribbean Sea.*"

As previously discussed, the 2010 Hague Compliance Report reflected during FY 2009 there were 1,621 children for whom a Hague application was filed. Alarming, 833 of these children were victims whose cross border abduction was into or out of a country that is considered either contiguous or adjacent to the U.S. The report indicates that 652 children were taken OUT of the U.S. and into contiguous or adjacent countries. An additional 181 children were brought INTO the U.S. from contiguous or adjacent countries who are Hague treaty partners. The annual Hague Compliance Report does not indicate how many children are abducted into the U.S. from countries that are not Hague Treaty partners. We believe that the available data indicates a substantial security

breach exists due to a lack of uniformity in documentary requirements while crossing international borders within the Western Hemisphere.

The opportunity for trafficking of children in the Caribbean is substantial. As Anthony M. Davis, the former U.S. Coast Guard Officer and the best-selling author of ‘Terrorism and Maritime Transportation System’ shared, “There's significant potential for illegal cross-border travel off the shores of Puerto Rico and other U.S. island territories. Generally, there is a consistent flow of people on small, low vessels called ‘Yolas’. During my Coast Guard time I saw many of the boats involved with illegal travel were from the Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico’s west coast. However, there also exists a substantial number of boats traveling from Puerto Rico to other island-nations. While Coast Guard and other assets look for these hard-to-spot vessels, they typically search for those heading toward Puerto Rico, not leaving it. In many cases of incoming vessels, it was common to have undocumented women and children of all ages traveling on these boats.

“Due to the close proximity of many of the island-nations to U.S. territory including Puerto Rico, St. Thomas, and St. John, there’s a substantial opportunity for parents and traffickers to criminally remove a child from the United States across international borders to carry out an illegal act. The reasons: difficulties related to logistics in inspection and documentation requirements. Unquestionably, illegal inter-island travel originating from a U.S. territory to another Caribbean island nation is a serious matter, one easily capitalized on by individuals involved in crimes against children. In order to prevent individuals who seek to capitalize on our exit controls in U.S. island territories, it is important for the courts to recognize the relative ease of illegal travel connected to the Caribbean.”

Sea Travel Closed-Loop Voyages

We are also very concerned that the documentary requirements for a “closed loop” cruise ship or other water vessel’s voyage or itinerary to contiguous countries or adjacent islands allows travelers to be exempt from the documentary requirements necessary for other types of travel. The CBP defines “closed loop” as occurring when *“a vessel departs from a U.S. port or place and returns to the same U.S. port upon completion of the voyage. U.S. citizens who board a cruise ship at a port within the United States, travel only within the Western Hemisphere, and return to the same U.S. port on the same ship may present a government issued photo identification, along with proof of citizenship (an original or copy of his or her birth certificate, a Consular report of Birth Abroad, or a Certificate of Naturalization). A U.S. citizen under the age of 16 will be able to present either an original or a copy of his or her birth certificate, a Consular Report of Birth Abroad issued by DOS, or a Certificate of Naturalization issued by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.”*

Travel requirements for children traveling at sea are quite alarming. The porous documentation controls in place due to the WHTI facilitate child abduction opportunity at

sea in unthinkable ways. For example, there are certain cruise ships that have ports of call in other countries that cater specifically to children. These cruise ships hold over 5,000 passengers and typically have weekly departures. With thousands of children boarding one of these cruise ships, we acknowledge it is clear there is substantial opportunity for a parental or non-parental child abduction to occur.

In a likely scenario for cruise ship related international parental child abduction or child trafficking, an individual could presumably board a cruise ship with a targeted child with limited or fraudulent documentation for the child, travel to WHTI designated foreign ports, disembark with the child at a port of call and simply choose not to re-board the ship, effectively circumventing the necessity of a passport which is required for other types of travel.

The potential to illegally remove a child across international borders via cruise ship travel is substantially magnified because currently there are no systematic data base controls and other security measures that would prevent a child's illegal departure from the United States. Exemplifying this grave concern are direct statements made from the security departments of two of the world's largest cruise lines operators. In statements made by both companies, neither have a security database that would enable a parent nor a court of law to place a child's name on a 'no embarkment' list due to specified court order. So even if a court order is issued that either directly names the cruise ship company as part of the action or if the court order references the cruise ship company to prohibit a child's departure but does not list the cruise ship as part of the legal action, the cruise ship companies have nothing in place that would enable them to comply with the court order.

When representatives in the security departments of both cruise ship companies were asked what could be done with a court order prohibiting a child's departure, each spokesperson suggested that if the targeted parent knew what cruise ship and departure date their child was scheduled to travel on, then it would be up to the parent to contact local law enforcement.

Obviously, the ability for a single parent trying to protect their child's abduction to run from cruise ship port to cruise ship port hoping to determine if their child is traveling on one of the ships is more than daunting and unrealistic, particularly since the vast majority of international child abductions are well planned, and cleverly orchestrated.

In a time of increased international security concerns, it is inconceivable that the only type of data bases most cruise ship operators have in place is a data base that flags previous passengers from traveling on their fleet due to past conduct on board one of their ships.

Remarkably, there is no systematic check to determine if a child's name has been placed on any law enforcement or government travel alert lists. However, if a U.S. passport was required and the U.S. passport was scanned, then a border patrol agent would have immediate access to potentially critical information regarding the safety of the child. We

call upon the cruise ships to act responsibly by establishing security procedures including a 'no-embarkment' database that would assist in the prevention of international parental child abduction and human trafficking.

When we consider there are approximately 760 cruises scheduled to depart from the U.S. and travel in a 'closed loop' to the Caribbean during fiscal year 2011, this becomes very concerning. Our worry increases after we consider there are 47 "closed loop" cruises scheduled to depart the U.S. to Canada during the same period. And finally, our concern surges when we realize that there are 379 cruises scheduled to depart the U.S. and travel in a "closed loop" to Mexico.

As previously discussed in this report, Mexico is a hotbed for 'reported' and 'unreported' incoming and outgoing international parental child abduction cases. A substantial number of U.S. parents have filed a Hague application due to the criminal international abduction of their child or children. Unfortunately, very few abducted children return to the U.S. despite court orders demanding the child's return. These opinions are substantially backed by the U.S. Department of State, as Mexico has repeatedly been reported to Congress as a non-compliant member of the Hague Convention. In addition, Mexico's record as a country known for its criminal activity of human trafficking is substantial.

We express our grave concern that cruise ships may be utilized to transport children illegally to and from the U.S., Mexico, and Canada as well island nations of the Caribbean.

It is inconceivable that U.S. children are still permitted to travel to specific foreign countries in accordance with the WHTI without a passport. Today, nearly 30% of all U.S. citizens possess a passport. As that number continues to grow substantially each year it is unthinkable not to require a passport for a child to travel abroad. In 2011 cruise ships are scheduled to originate from the U.S and travel to 63 ports of call in Mexico, 48 ports in the Caribbean, and from 20 ports of call in Canada. We contend that a failure to require children to present a passport for all international travel is an act of misguided negligence.

<u>Closed-Loop Foreign Destination</u>	<u>Number of Cruises</u>	<u>Number of Ports</u>
Caribbean	760	63
Canada	43	20
Mexico	379	48

The CBP does state that a U.S. Citizen "may" be required to present a U.S. passport if disembarking at a foreign port but that this requirement is up to the individual ports-of-entry. We must also consider that smaller personal watercrafts traveling to foreign ports

under a “closed-loop” journey offer distinct opportunity for child abductors and human traffickers to circumvent our nation’s laws or court orders. The lack of formidable travel documentation for cruise ship or other water vessel excursions originating from and returning to the United States is a black hole for would-be child abductors or traffickers.

The fact that cruise ships are being utilized in human trafficking is not unrecognized within the U.S. or in other countries. The following statements come directly from a human rights watchdog organization in Belize.

The Belize Organization for Responsible Tourism (ORT) issues this appeal to cruise lines bringing passengers to Belize, a superhighway for human trafficking. *“We are asking for your help in stopping human trafficking in Belize. In particular, we appeal to Norwegian Cruise Line and Carnival Cruise Lines, which bring a combined 700, 000 tourists to Belize annually.*

Cruise lines have a moral responsibility to help stop human trafficking in Belize. Each year thousands of human trafficking victims are transited through Belize via its porous and corrupt borders. Many are exported to other countries and never seen again by their families. Many endure lives of forced prostitution in Belize ficha bars.”

As these serious challenges come to light, we need to create a comprehensive short-term and long-term strategy that will prevent child abduction and human trafficking from occurring due to limited WHTI child travel documentation requirements for land and sea travel. There remains a significant amount of work necessary to enhance border security so that current weaknesses will no longer be available to be exploited. Our children must become a priority and the risk of abduction and human trafficking be lessened through mandating legitimate and uniform travel documentation.

The issues of child abduction and child slavery have received relatively limited public exposure. There has been limited government reaction directed toward changing public policy, government agency operations and protocol, and reform of laws that may facilitate or enable international abduction. It is important to recognize that over the past two years there have been over 1,000 ‘reported’ cases of U.S. child citizens being criminally abducted to Mexico and untold numbers of unreported cases. Imagine how our nation would act if:

1. 25 school buses containing 40 defenseless 5th grader American students disappeared in Mexico; or,
2. 4 Boeing 757 passenger jets containing 250 middle school children each was hijacked; or,
3. A cruise ship with 1,000 high school students on a spring break trip was pirated off of Mexico’s borders; or,

4. A train traveling with 1,000 students and their teachers was hijacked.

Undoubtedly, there would be public outcry and reform at every level. However, our public and government concern has not reached levels that it should. The many voices of this unthinkable crime tend to be diluted due to the singular reporting methodology. It is imperative that immediate revisions in law and government policy be initiated including reform of the WHTI land and sea travel requirements for minors.

U.S. Passport Concerns and Statistics

International parental child abduction and human trafficking are extraordinary issues where there is no such thing as ‘collateral damage’. In the past, certain legislators have expressed concern that possession of a passport as a requirement to travel by either ground or sea to our neighboring countries would have a direct impact on commercial trade. One additional concern expressed by some of our policymakers is the requirement for a passport for all travel may be an expensive proposition for the average American family, particularly since a child’s passport alone costs over \$80.00. The cruise ship industry, with many of its fleet of ships bearing the flags of nations other than the United States, has petitioned against the use of passports for ‘closed loop’ travel since the conception of the WHTI. Obviously, the industry is concerned that the additional cost associated with a passenger having to obtain a passport may cause a potential traveling customer to view a cruise as too costly.

However, statistics for new passport issuances effectively dispute these claims.

According to Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs Maura Harty, “there were over 60 million U.S. citizens who had a valid passport in 2005.” Further research shows substantial increase in the number of U.S. Passports issued since 2005. They include:

1. 2006: 12,133,537 new passports; and,
2. 2007: 18,382,798 new passports; and,
3. 2008: 16,208,003 new passports; and,
4. 2009: 13,486,000 new passports.

Thus, there were over 60 million new passports issued during the past four years, excluding the number of passports presently issued during FY 2010. Unquestionably, we have become a passport-friendly society. We contend that a previous position that a passport requirement results in financial disadvantages to commerce are inaccurate, clearly outdated, and are misguided.

Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs Maura Harty, a proponent of harmonized passport travel stated, “*For increased security and increased document*

integrity . . . State and DHS together rarely, singly or together, visit with a foreign entity without touching that very point, that the better and more secure documents are, the better and more easy it is to facilitate legitimate travel by legitimate travelers.”

Admittedly, passport requirements for all children traveling internationally under all circumstances will result in increased cost to the potential international traveler. However, this additional level of security will help ensure the safety of all children. Furthermore, the heavy financial burden associated with the recovery of criminally abducted or trafficked children should be paramount to any economic conversation.

Unequivocally, we take the position that a passport requirement for international travel can potentially protect thousands of our nation’s innocent children from the cruel fate of international abduction or from entering into the infernos of human slavery. Our U.S. child-citizens are entitled to the fundamental rights of freedom, justice and liberty and we must protect them.

We recommend that the documentary requirements implemented for air travel in Phase One of WHTI be the same requirements necessary for cross-border land and sea travel. In the interest of the safety of all children, we request that there be no exceptions to the passport mandate for contiguous countries, adjacent countries or "closed loop" voyages. Specifically, that all children, regardless of age must possess a passport for any cross-border travel. Harmonization of the documentary requirements for all modes of travel and at all international borders will help us achieve a reduction in the heinous crimes of child abduction and human trafficking.

Recommendations And Strategies

We hope that this report will educate victim parents, legal professionals, and members of the judiciary about an assortment of viable exit strategies that would-be abductors and traffickers can capitalize on in order to commit crimes against our and other nation’s children. Child abduction prevention strategies are critical and must include efforts to prohibit a child’s potential travel to or around our neighboring countries by land or sea, including specific court ordered prohibition for cruise ship travel by any at-risk child who may fall prey to a would-be abductor.

Notwithstanding the vital need to raise awareness of the issues presented herein, we urge that the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative is immediately and urgently amended to include mandating that all international travel of any kind, including all travel for children, require a valid passport. By establishing all citizens to present a valid passport at a border crossing, the opportunity to reduce criminal activity as it is related to illegal border travel is substantial. If we are to close the existing loopholes that present child abductors and human traffickers the substantial opportunity to capitalize on the weak travel document requirement protocols presently in place under WHTI, the most effective and efficient way to do so is to establish an all-passport travel requirement for all international travel.

We recognize there must also be high priority short-term protocols implemented that will reduce the possibility of child abductions related to WHTI travel document requirement loopholes while moving to an all-passport travel requirement policy. Court-ordered prevention orders are critical to reduce child abduction threats; however, we acknowledge that under present WHTI travel requirements the use of documentation fraud is a strong reality. In addition, due to the limited existence of databases capable of flagging a child traveling under the present minimum travel documentation requirements established for children under WHTI and who are potential targets for abduction, we call for the implementation of substantially more training of CBP officers and for thorough security travel documentation checks for all children traveling abroad without a valid passport until such time that the desperately needed passport requirement is harmonized for all individuals regardless of age traveling abroad.

Pamela Michell, the founder of *Survivor On A Mission* and *Heroes In Training* stated, “As an advocate and survivor of human trafficking, I realize first-hand all types of abduction and abuse are widely unreported. Despite the spirit of the WHTI, international parental child abduction and trafficking of human cargo are rapidly increasing. An unacceptable and miniscule percentage of children and adults are ever recovered. Any loopholes in legal flaws in travel documentation requirements for international travel that may allow monsters to prey on others must immediately be changed. In the case of WHTI’s expansive flaws, we are not simply speaking about several isolated cases of targeted abduction, but of many thousands of at-risk children who could potentially fall into a dark world no words could ever possibly express. I call upon our political and governmental leaders to modify these laws in order to protect our children.”

If you believe your child is at risk of international abduction by their other parent, it is critical you immediately seek the assistance from the court overseeing your child’s welfare in order to obtain court-ordered abduction prevention orders issued by the court against the other parent. In initiating any urgent action, we strongly advise you seek the assistance of a lawyer familiar with both family court law and child abduction prevention strategies. We have provided a list of websites below that offer an array of prevention techniques and additional useful information that should be considered by you and your lawyer before you go into court. However, we also urge you to bring to the court’s attention potential exit strategies an abducting parent may attempt to capitalize on that are discussed specifically in this report, as the information we have exposed regarding land and sea exit options abductors may seek to capitalize on under the WHTI have, at the time of this report, have not been widely discussed until now.

It is not necessary to have a custody order for law enforcement to assist in the recovery of your child and any subsequent criminal proceedings. However, a custody order is often critical in recovery efforts if the other parent has abducted your child. A well-executed custody determination will establish the guidelines and protocols once your child is recovered. You must immediately seek civil remedies by going to court and obtaining a custody order and other civil relief that you may be entitled to.

If you believe the illegal removal of your child across international borders is in progress, we suggest you immediately and simultaneously, follow the action list below.

1. Immediately file a report with local law enforcement. Request local law enforcement to contact the FBI and enter information about your child in to the National Crime Information Center – Missing Person File (NCIC-MPF).

***NOTE:** The Adam Walsh Act and the PROTECT Act of 2003 (Prosecutorial Remedies and Other Tools to end the Exploitation of Children Today) require every local, state and federal law enforcement agency to report missing children, under 21 years of age, to NCIC within two hours of receiving the report. We advise that two hours after the report is made that you confirm the entry of your child into the NCIC system.*

2. Contact the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)–Missing Child Division (MCD) at 1-888-24-NCMEC or 1-888-246-2632. Their website is: www.missingkids.com
3. Urge the law enforcement agencies involved to contact the United States National Central Bureau (USNCB)-INTERPOL. This agency serves law enforcement only (not parents), so requesting INTERPOL involvement must come directly from law enforcement.
4. Critically, contact the Office Of Children's Issues at the U.S. Department of State at 202-736-9090 Monday-Friday and at 9 a.m.-5 p.m. 1-888-407-4747 after hours, weekends or holidays. Their website is as follows:
http://travel.state.gov/abduction/emergencies/emergencies_3845.html
5. Request that local law enforcement immediately begin a missing persons investigation under *The Missing Children's Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C., 5780 (3)(B), (C)*.
6. Contact the Missing Child Clearinghouse for your state (every state has one).
7. Contact NCMEC's Team HOPE (Hope Offering Parents Empowerment), which matches searching families with trained volunteers at 866-305-4673. Their website is: <http://www.teamhope.org>
8. For serious health and welfare concerns for a child, on occasion, the International Social Services, United States of America Branch, Inc, may be of assistance. Their phone number is 443-451-1200. Their website is: <http://www.iss-usa.org/>

As parents and activists we have directly and indirectly experienced the myriad of issues involving the tragedy of international child abduction and the difficulties in preventing it from occurring. We are committed to focusing our efforts on uncovering the deficiencies

that currently exist that continue to make international child abduction an all too common occurrence. In coming forward, we encourage everyone involved with protecting the welfare of at-risk children, including parents, members of the judiciary, policymakers, and members of law enforcement to recognize the existing risks we have shed light on, and to do whatever is necessary to protect our nation's children in conjunction with the laws of each child's state as well as existing federal legislation. As a parent, it is imperative that you ensure your legal counsel and family court personnel are well informed as to the risks that exist in your particular case. For more information on international child abduction and prevention, we suggest you visit the following websites:

1. The United States Department of State (www.travel.state.gov/abduction/abduction_580.html) [The Official website of The Office Of Children's Issues offers substantial information regarding IPCA].
2. National Center For Missing and Exploited Children (<http://www.missingkids.com>) [The Official website of NCMEC offers vast information on missing children and child abduction]
3. Amber Watch Foundation (<http://www.amberwatchfoundation.org>) [Provide educational programs and innovative technologies that proactively and preemptively protect children against abduction, predators, and the dangers of the digital world]
4. Chasing The Cyclone (<http://www.chasingthecyclone.com>) [The Official website of Peter Thomas Senese's *Chasing The Cyclone* provides a wealth of information on IPCA, including over 3 hours of educational documentary film footage].
5. The Uniform Child Abduction Prevention Act (UCAPA) (The Official website is: <http://www.nccusl.org>)
6. Team HOPE (<http://www.teamhope.org>) [Hope Offering Parents Empowerment official website: you will be matched with a trained volunteer].

We remain optimistic and hopeful that together we can raise awareness in order to create the changes necessary to better protect all children. We offer the following recommendations to educate and enlighten those whose duty and responsibility it is to protect our most treasured and vulnerable asset, our children.

It is critical that parents, lawyers, judges, policymakers, law enforcement, and all other individuals who are intricately involved in the welfare of our nation's children who are at risk of international abduction to carefully consider the information we have provided in this report when implementing or overseeing policy or direction on behalf of an at-risk child. Failure to do so will lead to additional cross-border abductions.

If a policy is implemented where all foreign travel by U.S. adult and child citizens, requires the traveler to present a U.S. passport, we believe we will see a dramatic reduction in the total number of 'reported' and anticipated 'unreported' cases of international parental child abduction. We would also anticipate a substantial reduction in the number of human trafficking cases passing through our borders as well.

Protecting one child's life from the fate of international abduction or human slavery is reason alone to seek the changes recommended above. However, with thousands of potential child victims each year at risk, the necessity of protecting our borders is critically urgent. We must act now to change current WHTI travel documentation policy.

About the Authors:

Carolyn Ann Vlk is a child abduction prevention advocate who drafted the landmark State of Florida's 'Child Abduction Prevention Act' that will be enacted on January 1st, 2011. Ms. Vlk was highly influential in raising the public's awareness on the little-known, highly effective child abduction prevention federal program titled the 'Prevent Departure Program'. Carolyn is also a writer/producer of the highly educational documentary film series titled 'Chasing Parents: Racing Into The Storms Of International Parental Child Abduction', and, is the author of numerous essays and studies on parental child abduction, including the groundbreaking report titled 'Crisis in America: International Parental Child Abduction Today' (2010). Carolyn is dedicated to assisting parents and their children who are targets of international child abduction, and is committed to bringing about positive reform and change in law and government protocol that has been established to aid at-risk children. Ms. Vlk is a supporter of The Hague Convention, The Department of State's Office Of Children's Issues, and the Uniform Child Abduction Prevention Act (UCAPA). Carolyn is a loving and dedicated mother to her children, and fought rigorously to protect her own child who was a target for potential abduction that she went so far as to draft legislation that has now become new law in her home state of Florida. To contact Carolyn Ann Vlk, please e-mail her at carolynannvlk@yahoo.com

Peter Thomas Senese is a child abduction prevention advocate and a successful chasing parent in accordance to the rules of international parental child abduction law established under the Hague Convention. Peter advocated for the passage of the State of Florida's 'Child Abduction Prevention Act' (CAPA) that will be enacted on January 1st, 2011. In addition, he contributed to raising public awareness on the previously widely underutilized federal child abduction prevention program; specifically, the 'Prevent Departure Program' (PDP) that is now more commonly implemented in aiding targeted parents and their child from abduction in certain case scenarios. Peter is the creator/writer/producer of the educational documentary film series 'Chasing Parents: Racing Into The Storms Of International Parental Child Abduction', a best-selling author whose upcoming world-wide book release that focuses on international child abduction titled 'Chasing The Cyclone' has been critically acclaimed as a call-to-arms against child abduction. Peter is the writer of an extensive number of influential articles and essays pertaining to IPCA. He has created and oversees a comprehensive website dedicated to child abduction prevention and good parenting (www.chasingthecyclone.com) where numerous essays and may be found, including the eye-opening report 'Crisis In America: International Parental Child Abduction Today' Peter co-authored with Ms. Carolyn Vlk. Dedicated to bringing about new child abduction prevention laws while creating dialogue that may reform certain government

programs and protocols so that they may better serve targeted children and their parents, Peter Senese is a strong supporter of The Hague Convention and The Department of State's Office Of Children's Issues. Paramount to all things, Peter is a loving father deeply dedicated to raising his young son. To contact Peter Thomas Senese, please e-mail him at pthomas@chasingthecyclone.com or at peter@petersenese.com

END REPORT