

INFORMAL TRANSCRIPT

1 hour JCICS Ethiopia Caucus Conference Call

Note: Not everything could be well understood, and not clear many times who was speaking. Anyone who can help improving the transcript, please contact info@againstchildtrafficking.org

Conference Call JCICS Ethiopia Caucus 6 March 2014

Participants

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All God's Children : Kiersten Luginbill
Adoption Associates : Jean??/Dean?? Wilder??
Adoption Associates : Sally Mouw??
Adoptions of Indiana : Deb Martie??
All God's Children : Toni Day & Julie Webb
Illien Adoption : Anna Belle Illien
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Bay Area Adoption Services (California): Janet Shirley
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Children's House Int. : Annie?
Children's Homes : Christina Burgan??
Bethany Global : Catherine Rock??
JCICS : Rebecca Harris
JCICS : Tom DiFilipo
International Adoption Net : Casey Howell (casey@internationaladoptionnet)
?? : Kathleen ?? (at 27:00)
?? : Cheryl ?? (at 33:00)

Chair: Great, really nice group. Happy you are all with us.

Rebecca, mute phones, cut background noise out?

I'm hoping it will be a pretty lively discussion, anyone who wants to chime in here would have to hit *6 again.

What we have on the agenda today is a discussion of the status of adoptions in general from Ethiopia. Also, you know, what I think we are all experiencing right now, with regional governments not signing off on cases. There is somewhat of a delay, or closure if you want to call it, for right now. So does anyone who want to give an update on what their agency is experiencing?

Also, what we're all experiencing in the PAIR process. I'd be interested, personally, to hear what folks are going through with that.

We are going to give an update on the Joint Council Initiative that we've been trying to put into place for Ethiopia. And then certainly with the news that broke recently, regarding, you know, IAG, the arrest, that case, so, um, just sort of going through that.

So without further ado, just anyone who wants to join in on how the status of adoption, I think we have all been experiencing adoptions slowing down. Or orphanages - from my perspective - us, really not engaging too much in the orphanage work, from Wide Horizon's perspective. And we are placing fewer and fewer children. In general we are probably going to be somewhere in the placing under 10 children this year, I would say, from Ethiopia. Anyone who would like to jump in on the status of adoptions that your agency is experiencing?

Scott Rail? with Gladney Center: We're experiencing the same thing, just a slow down. We had budgeted 18 placements this year, fiscal year in August and it looks like we'll end up doing maybe 14 this year, probably less next year.

This is Nicky at Children's Hope: I just wanted to add in addition to the Regional MOWA situation that we've seen, we had heard that the Federal MOWA is not approving any cases right now. We have had some positive movement in one province and our one region. But even once we obtain those Regional MOWA letters, we are understanding that there is nothing happening in the Federal MOWA. So no cases are moving forward. We have obtained some first, or birth parents court dates for cases, but once they have the birth parents in court, they either are closing the case, or just waiting on the Federal MOWA letter.

Chair: And is that related to the PAIR process? Or your cases already have...you know, or these are pre-PAIR cases?

Nicky at Children's Hope: Some are pre-PAIR, some are not. It doesn't seem to really have anything to do with PAIR. My understanding is that the Federal MOWA is not signing anything right now. Regardless of PAIR.

In regards to PAIR.... It does seem like it is taking a lot longer. Our first cases that went through The first PAIR cases were pretty accurate and on the timeline they said, and now it seems like it is taking a lot longer to get through the PAIR process.

XX1: Our experience with PAIR is the same. We have one family, and it's been sort of months. An RFD, and then, you know, of course the birth parent doesn't show up 3 times for their interview at the embassy – so, not that that's anyone's fault, but in general, it is lengthening everything by, I would say, months, there's delays, by months from what I have seen.

Megan (Cook Nikiema?) from WACAP (World Association for Children and Parents?): I was just going to say most our cases are in Tigray, in the North, and it is our understanding that be it Regional or Federal, it's really the Regional Government that's actually recalled cases that had already been approved and we had started the court process after PAIR approval and they're holding those cases back again. I have been hearing though from some of our families who network with other adoption families with other agencies that one of their friends with another agency has a case from the Southern Region and another from the Oromo Region that did recently get approval, and I'm wondering if other agencies, not that we work there, but it is just hopeful that anything is moving. I was wondering if anyone can speak to that.

Chair: I have only heard that everything is not processing right now. Has anyone heard anything different? You know, anything different, that cases are going through?

This is Sally, Adoption Associates: We do have a family that was scheduled for their Court Hearing this week and it's scheduled for next week. Now, the letter from MOWA was maybe submitted to the Court before they, before they stopped signing, before they stopped anything. I am not really sure exactly when it was submitted, but we do have a family travelling for Court this weekend. Everything else has been held up by Regional MOWAs. All the regional clearances are held up.

XX1: And from what I heard all of this is related to I think piggybacking on the general climate toward adoption in Ethiopia, starting, probably a while back, but certainly December, that whole conference thing at the end of December, and then the recent TV programming that was throughout the country with very negative portrayal of intercountry adoption, with basically families buying children is what our staff is reporting and our staff is doing a lot of advocacy, but it seems to be that the climate is really really negative and for that reason I think the Government is acting the way that it is.

Chair: Anything else on that topic at all, in terms of the Governments and not signing? Is there anyone, any suggestions anyone has for what you're doing? Or what your agency's tactics, if you have any, anything you are trying to do.

Nicky Children's Hope: Our families are asking what they can do. I think they just anxious to do something. They originally wanted to send letters to the Regional MOWA and our staff kind of laughed, just saying really it didn't matter what the family thought, but I didn't know if, collaboratively, if anyone thought that writing to someone, I don't know who that would be, whether to the US Government asking the State Department to get involved or to the Federal MOWA, Regional MOWA. I don't know if anyone has any idea about a letter writing campaign or something that could about come from the agencies.

Bethany Global (Catherine): Our impression is that advocacy through parents to the Federal Government is received really negatively, because of the bad perception and just sending random advocacy like that is keeping it in a negative way, I think it would be better to advocating with JCICS and through the Adoption Network on the Ethiopian side. But I know that the families did try to advocate with MOWA and directly with the Minister and that wasn't well received.

Chair: Yes, that's always the fear that we have such a vested interest in the sense that we are saying, yes please give us your children, and you know whether it is the families or the agencies, that I agree with Catherine, it would probably be better received through – well if there is an advocacy effort then it is usually better received from the Joint Council or someone from the Network, someone who's not specifically the adoptive parents or Adoption Service Providers.

Catherine (Bethany Global): That's been done already, .. Advocacy, working with the Minister and with MOWA, Federal MOWA.

12:40

Dan Lauer from Holt: I did follow up with IES when I was in Ethiopia in January, er, following, the, you know the Parliament controversies, you know that negative documentary that was being shown, well she was very clear about the Federal Government does not have any intention to stop adoptions. There is virtually a moratorium on adoptions in my opinion. And the questions we need to get to is, where does this fit in the Government's desire or plans to do either reform or change adoptions and is anybody, are there discussions going on as a result of these issues between Regional and Federal MOWA, or is this simply Ethiopia's response to all the negativism and nobody is going to do anything for a while.

Duni Zenaye from Children's House International: I don't think the Federal Government is ever gonna say we are going to stop down adoption entirely. What's happening is that they are just starting it from the grassroot level. One changing their policy is that, you know how children enter the orphanage, and then going back and forth between Regional and Federal MOWA not really reaching some sort of consensus on how they wanna proceed with adoptions. Cases and clearance issues. And the other thing is, the way they are tackling these issues is by, through media, what they just did back in December, changing the outlook that people have about adoption. If the birth mother feels like her child is gonna be abused and die in another country, I think, she's gonna decide – you know – Ok, I rather have the child just die in starvation here.

The same thing with Regional, or Kebele, or you know, folks that really work at the lower level and getting a child into an orphanage, if their outlook is really negative about adoption, and it really just affects the entire adoption process and the number of children being adopted out of Ethiopia, so, I think they are doing it is just kind of indirectly through media and then just making the process so complicated that really no children can be adopted. I think we all know that there are so many children in orphanages right now, but none of them have paperwork, or will have any paperwork coming out any time soon. For instance in the South, saying that only special needs children can leave, and then they just only sign off on special needs children, but then once they are done they are still not signing off on children who are healthy.

So I think that for advocacy we really should be talking about maybe positive media on our end, in showing that children are doing well when they come to the US and – you know – the process overall, trying to influence that negative outlook on adoption – kind of like the coming up culture they like. You know, even a judge who has nothing to do with the actual approval of an adoption, but during a relinquishment process trying to tell the birth mother “Have you seen a documentary back in December, why are you relinquishing your child?”. Really trying to convince the mother not to send her child overseas based on the TV documentary that was aired. So if families ask you to collaborate, we can think of some positive media that can be aired nationally in Ethiopia that can be a good thing, not from us, but really just talking about adoptive families saying good things about adoptions.

Nicky at Children’s Hope : We were told by our staff, our representative told us that the Network was working on their own positive ads that were going to be running, but that’s over there, but that was obviously not involving adoptive families – but maybe we could tag onto what they are already working on.

16:50

Catherine (Bethany Global): My understanding is the Network is doing the same thing as well.

Megan from WACAP: I would say, from a pro-active perspective of what agencies can be doing, maybe not what families can do, but what agencies can be doing. I think it is also supporting the Government. They are asking specific questions right now. They are continuously trying to make the process better and it just gets messy. They really need a centralized authority. But in the interim, without that, I think one of the things WACAP has been trying to do in advocating in the Regions is saying “we understand that this is messy and you will take some time to evaluate how to proceed, we want to help” and just being super respectful and making ourselves available. If and when you want to reinvestigate our cases, we are 100 % supportive of that. We are also trying to advocate that they do that NOW, as opposed to just sitting back and letting them twiddle their thumbs about it. So that has been somewhat positive. I know the Regional head in Tigray made a comment to our staff, thanking him for his perspective and she made a kind of under-the-breath comment to him, about if only more agencies could be a little bit more respectful we might be able to have a more productive way forward in advocating for kids that truly need to be adopted. But she is of the strong belief that most kids probably don’t need to be adopted and I think that kind of goes back to work the network can do to kind of help identify work that maybe agencies have done that probably isn’t so great and I know we’ll probably talk about that later, versus maybe a better understanding of who these kids are and whether or not they are eligible.

Tom DiFilipo: I am not sure who said the comment about making sure we have some positive media. Who was that?

Duni: Duni Zenaye at Children’s House International

19:07

Tom DeFilipo: I couldn’t agree with you more and I also think we need to have a holistic approach to this and it needs to be coordinated and kind of strategic. So I know, the Network, someone said this, the they’re doing something, that they’re doing something, that they have been very effective with their advocacy over the last couple of years. So I like to try and engage that a little bit more. Same thing with whoever’s doing a positive network piece. Find out what they are doing. Kind of build a loose coalition, nothing formal, something loose that we all know what we are all doing, so it is not something as a strategic fashion. Because the concern that I have is that if you notice the stuff that is in the press, whether it is here or in Ethiopia, is not coming from the traditional sources that we have seen in the past. The Save the Children and UNICEF are not out there publicly decrying adoption. That is very strategically, purposeful move on their part. They recognized that one of their problems is based on their PR piece and that they were kind of creating an adversarial position, needlessly, into the public.

So, I wouldn’t assume that they are still not advocating for either a complete slow-down or stoppage of international adoption, but they are not doing that publicly. Right?

With that said, if you look at other countries, whether it is Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Guatemala, to a certain extent Russia, when the environment turns toxic in the public setting and international adoption becomes criminal, it becomes demonized, it is painted as trafficking, whether it’s judges, people from the Regional MOWAs, the national MOWA’s. My fear is that the same thing is going to happen in Ethiopia as in all the other 4 countries, which is people will not make a move, will be afraid to be painted in the presence, with their colleagues, within the Government, as traffickers. We know you are a trafficker, we just cannot prove it - that kind of an idea. I have seen that in country after country. It becomes a toxic situation, and then no matter what you do, you don’t get any advancement. In Guatemala that’s true all the way up to a point where we set down with delegations of USCIS, Homeland Security, the US Department of State, Members of Congress, advocacy groups going down continually, and you still have a complete fear of processing any adoptions. And that is true for Kyrgyzstan as well as other countries a little. So that’s my concern. That’s my biggest concern actually. And I think that we need to advocate with the Government for sure, but at the same time if we don’t do something in the public forum, to counter the demonization, I think we are going to be seeing almost the complete, as Dan said, the complete stoppage now, and no real future.

22:10

Duni Zenaye (Children’s House International): As far as advocating directly with the Government and assisting government, I think we have been doing that for years now. I personally was involved in trying to start to get them to start, to get a centralized authority,

and even took them all the way to China and the US to show them a centralized system in other countries. I think they would say, great, we would love for you to be involved. Do this, more often. But then, it is not backed by action and so, I think, whenever we directly approach them, they always said the nicest things but then they go back out there and still demonize adoption. And I really think that we really need to be going more to the public than directly to Government, because they'll gonna tell us what we like to hear anyway. For instance, the Minister – after she said what she said on media, when she was confronted by the Adoption Network, she denied having said that. And actually accused the reporter of having been paid-off and she was not the one who said that. I mean, imagine that. She said it, and still denied it in front of adoption agencies. Because in that meeting room she tells them they are partners and she does not want to shut them down, that she is supportive. But then she is turning the environment toxic and she is making sure that no children enter an orphanage, or once they enter an orphanage cannot leave an orphanage, and yet to their face says that is not something she is doing. It really is very strategic and I think we need to start being really strategic and as far as the media goes, we ought

Right when this thing came out, we did go directly to adoptive families and they were very interested. They sent us a lot of videos, home videos of what they are doing with their children. Some of them are really well done. And we have started some production of those families, pick up their children or when they meet the birth family and years later we are starting to capture that on video in Ethiopia. But if we could once again, maybe organize it, actually come up with airtime, it is not going to cost too much. Families really want to participate. And really show that adoption is a good option for children and to counter that through media would really be urgent that we all are on the same page and come up with a plan and not so much rely on the Adoption Network. Because they have been doing that for years and it really hasn't gotten us anywhere.

Tom DiFilipo: If I could just tag on to that one more time, the concern I would have about promoting or showing videos of kids here in the US is twofold. Well, threefold:

1. It has not worked in other countries.
2. The accusations aren't, the primary accusation is not the kids aren't doing well here in the United States. But the WAY they get to the United States, by being bought, stolen, or trafficked. So, by just showing that – not that that is what you are proposing, but an overreliance on kids are doing great, and adoption is a good thing, it really hasn't worked and I am not sure that's what would create a less toxic environment. We have to demonstrate that we are doing other work. That we are not there to just grab kids and the way we get kids for the adoption system has a purpose and a really clean process.

Duni Zenaye: The whole thing. I think we should show everything. I think we should show how the way that these kids are coming into the process, showing maybe how a child enters the orphanage, but in Ethiopia, from what I am seeing, and I am there a lot, and from what a lot of people tell me, they do talk about how a child enters, but the general public is more concerned about, OMG, how are these children doing. We heard about, that you know, that media about Hana Williams, you know who was killed here and abused, they seem to think and really focus on these things and think a lot of children are not doing well. And I think we should touch upon that as well and really try to make that whole thing...

26:20

Holt (Dan): I think that... as far as the media has come up from a lot of different fronts. You can produce things, but it costs money. It would also need to be really coordinated amongst us all, to do something collectively. Are we willing to put the time and effort and money into that?

Tom DiFilipo: That was going to be my next point, Dan. Thank you for that. Also, do we have the ability to get things onto the national TV?

Duni Zenaye: We are doing it already. We are just asking if all of you can maybe participate, I mean, it might be a good thing...

Kathleen(?): My question is, how involved is the State Department, Tom, do you know, how aware they are, how involved they're willing to get, or is this not something they are even interested in right now? Kathleen

27:10

Tom DiFilipo: This is just my assessment. I am not speaking on their behalf, this is not a fact. But my take and our assessment is that they are not going to go in and advocate for more kids to be adopted. They will go in and advocate for a system and they are right now engaged with the IAG situation. They are not getting a lot of positive answers out of the Ministry, so they are kind of in a wait-mode. You know, just asking questions. I have not seen them recently, let's say the last 2,5 years, maybe 3.5 years in Ethiopia, where they are going in and advocating for or on behalf of intercountry adoption. For the agencies, the families and the kids. That's not what they do. They can kind of say that, but that is not what their mandate it. Their consular officers, that's one of the reasons why we came up with that Children and Families First Act, you know. Because they are consular officers first and foremost and for 99 %. Their deal is not advocating for more adoptions. If it slows down, I don't really think, well, ...

Duni Zenaye: That's what we all want as well, a clean and clear system. My concern is that nothing is happening. I think that someone said previously, we are all fine with having the cases re-investigated and open them back up again, but my understanding is that nothing is being done. They say that's what they are doing, but nothing's being done. It is just at a standstill.

28:57

Dan (Holt): To get to a clean and transparent process, will take major reform in Ethiopia. And I guess the question that I would ask myself and my agency at Holt would be, are we willing to, to say "OK, we will just step back, maybe suspend our own adoptions and say 'we are here to help'?" To get to that end, without you know, I guess it is theoretical. That would be kind of a radical new approach. Say: We are here to help.

29:27

Duni: That's why I say this is so difficult - because there is not a moratorium. I think even if us as an agency said, if they would just call a moratorium, it would actually be better. To be honest, because at least...

Dan (Holt): I agree with that, actually. If they have a moratorium... a move to a reform, that would be a very good...

Duni: I mean, do they have ... because we're not giving out referrals, we're not taking applications. Basically, we have our own moratorium. It is a few families that are caught. It is really unfair to those children, it is really unfair to the families that can't, that are just stuck. So it would be better if they, I mean I don't want a moratorium, but at least we would know they'd be working towards something - I don't know.

30:20

Tom DiFilipo: I think they were strongly advised not to declare a moratorium. And I don't think that they will.

XX: I don't think that's what they want. I think they want every agency to slowly die, and maybe a few to survive in Ethiopia. I really think that is their plan. And they are already seeing that, you know. Agencies are starting to sort of leave at their own free will. And the few that are there, it's not going to be in great numbers. And the less agencies, the less adoption, the less corruption, really. I think the biggest problem in Ethiopia is that as the number increases, and the demand is there, more corruption seems to take place. And I think that's what, I think that's what they plan, they haven't gone out and said it, but it looks like that's what they're doing. They don't entirely shut it down, but just discourage agencies so they leave.

Kiersten:

Tom DiFilipo: Looking at this in a much larger global context. I can agree with Dan on the almost self imposed closure/moratorium, whatever you wanna call them. Because really, and this is a very cynical thing for me to say, do they want international adoptions to stay open, or do they want them to close? What I think they want is to continue funding streams from large international NGOs, who don't believe that children should be moving from one country to the next, in any kind of significant numbers. The only kids that should move are older and special needs. Period.

The idea that the real concern is about the corruption is, to me, just like the Hague Convention is used, to the rationale, to achieve the end. The end is not to move these kids from one country to the next. That just to me gives a different kind of perspective.

One of the things which was effective in the past, which we have done, with our own advocacy, is to go over and demonstrate the amount of financial assistance to be provided to the country, through our coalition. Now, it is not nearly the amount it used to be. But that was a leverage point for us, just like it is a leverage point for anyone who is providing financial assistance to a country. So..I don't know what

33:00

Cheryl Gardner(?) : Can I add something here? Can you hear me? We pulled out of Ethiopia, everybody knows. But they may not know why we pulled out of Ethiopia. We got kind of hit with the same thing. What are you doing for us? You are just taking our children. But what are you doing for us. We had an orphanage that we totally financed. And we had a lot of older children. And we said, look, you know how you drop off a truckload of boulders every day at the end of the dirt roads and then the poorest of the poor go out there, get a sledge hammer, and for the local Kebele for a dollar a day, they bust open rocks. I said, some of these young babies and toddlers that are being abandoned, are people don't know what to do with them because they are out there working. The young girls are also out there working, busting boulders, and they are leaving their young children at home alone. So, here we have an orphanage with a lot of beds and the kids are in private school, are older kids, and the orphanage is there, the building is there, we rent it from Ethiopian people, we had Ethiopian staff, so what I wanted to do is to set up a free daycare. And I want these young women, instead of leaving their young children home alone, while they go do any job, bring them to us in the morning. We will feed them 3 meals a day. We have a nurse on the staff all the time. We have a doctor in here 3 days a week. We'll make sure that they are healthy, that they are fed well. That they have vitamins, that they have all of their vaccines. And when Mom is done for the day, she can pick up the child. Knowing the child had dinner. It has been bathed and ready to go to bed. So she doesn't leave her child at home all day.

I was told by the Government that wasn't good enough. I wasn't doing anything for the Government. And instead they turned around and said, we want you to sponsor 250 children with 35 dollar a month. And I said, who are these children? And they said: don't worry about that, we'll have the children. I said: no, we cannot do anything to ask to sponsor children with 35 dollar a month if I don't know anything. So I got a first name and a black and white copy of a stamp-size photo of a child with a first name and I was told "get the money together, 35 dollars a month" x 250, and send it to the Government and we will distribute it.

At the same time the landlord came in and said: we don't want to be paid once a year, we want two years rent on the house you are using as an orphanage and we are doubling the rent. And I turned and said: "We are out of here". They want to know what they can get, not what will help the children. They want to know what they can get - on the backs of the children.

Tom DiFilipo: I think everybody has agreed that we need Government advocacy and we also need to do public campaigning. And going back to Dan's point, we can talk about this all day. If we don't have the money, and I have no idea what the budget will be. I am sure you guys can put that stuff together, but do we want to get a proposal together? And how we could get it funded?

XX: I think that makes sense

Cheryl: I was talking to an agency that also pulled out, and they were asked for 130,000.00 dollars to be given to the Government. And they said: We are out of here.

Tom DiFilipo: So, is there anybody on the call who can put a proposal together in terms of costs.

Dan (Holt): There is an agency who is working on that already? What are they doing?

Duni Zenaye: Yeah, we were not doing it for a lot of money, we are using staff in Ethiopia. I have been doing it before, when I worked for Adoption America World. We did domestic adoption campaigns. It is not a lot of money. I mean you can really do it for, especially if you're offputting it. We can maybe put that together and send it to everyone and whoever wants to jump in can and I think as an encouragement we can maybe mention that agency as a sponsor or whatever. And then it is a matter of just buying airtime nationally. I think that is worth the while.

Cheryl?: Are you talking about public service announcements, or are you talking about literally purchasing airtime?

Duni Zenaye: Literally purchasing airtime.

Cheryl?: Oh that's heavy money.

Duni Zenaye: It is not: you are thinking US heavy money. In Ethiopia purchasing airtime is not the same amount of money as it is here.

38:15

Dan (Holt): We touched on this a bit when I was there last with the Network, with the news. It does seem feasible. That's the only way to get it out, to simply buy the time.

Chair: That's a much better use of any kind of advocacy. Even than the Initiative, you know I think it almost falls into or could fall into the JCICS Ethiopia Initiative.

Dan (Holt): Oh sure, if the Initiative isn't clearly defined by any means, I think this could definitely be a part of that.

Chair: I could see it falling right into that.

Kiersten (All God's Children): I just wanted to echo too, I think that this avenue would be a really positive way for us to present a united front, the way we think of about child care, and family preservation, and all of the different kind of work beyond adoption that we're all pushing for as well, to be able to present that in a united way. I just think that would be really strong. 'Cause I know a lot of you are doing a lot of work outside of adoption in Ethiopia and a lot of those programs and projects are really important and are doing a lot of great things in Ethiopia to benefit children to present that in a public way would make a really strong statement.

Tom: I couldn't agree more. I think there's a lot of great work being done. And I know Bethany has done foster care and have 100's and 100's of kids and I know a lot of you have done similar things and that message certainly isn't getting out at all.

Chair: OK, that's great. Do we want to move on? Do we want to tie this into what we see firmly as the Joint Council Initiative? Let's maybe keep going on this thread. And how we can, well, Tom, you just put out an update, where we are today, but I think we should have a broader discussion with the group around what else we can be doing, is there anything else?

Tom: Yes, we would be happy to have this incorporated into the Initiative. I think it's a natural, I think it's part of the advocacy we've wanted to build into. We've had a lot of different reasons. To Evolve the program, to try to keep it fluid so that we're not doing damage to the cause. So we'd be happy to do that. I do think there's still value in still doing a trip, an advocacy trip. And not going over as a brute force, but doing it in the way we've done it in the past, going under the radar, and having our meetings and all that, also use that as a data and information gathering trip. And come back, kind of use that to...

Dan: As an initiative, We could begin to have 1) Positive media approach. 2) Delegation to travel, I mean to go to Ethiopia as soon as possible.

41:50

Tom: And then we do have Dr. (Desalegn?) Berhe coming over, President of the First Instance Court. He'll be here for the symposium he'll be with us in San Francisco for 3 days, I think that's a great opportunity, to let him see, he's a positive force with adoption I think, that could bolster. Maybe what we do, thinking out loud, use that as an opportunity. Maybe we get some families from San Francisco area to come over and meet him, and videotape him.

Others: Oh, I think that's a Great idea. That's a good idea

Tom: Now, keep in mind when I throw out those kind of ideas that impact what happens at the symposium, I'm not the symposium boss. And we have limited staff resources all that, so.

Rebecca: I'm not sure if everybody heard my Collective freaking out on the videotape

Tom: I guess what we'd saying is that I guess, we'd be willing to help facilitate that, but we would need someone to be a point person almost, to contact the video, videographer, figure out how we're going to pay for it, and help do the logistics 'cause we're pretty much maxed out. At this point, with the symposium stuff

Dan: Is there anyone on this call who would be willing to take that on? I think, come to the symposium with a detailed proposal for media, production and then purchasing

Duni from Children's House International: I can take on the airtime and uh the Ethiopia side of the production, because we're already doing that.

Chair: Sorry, who was that?

Duni: Duni from Children's House International

Dan: 'Cause I think we all need to be prepared to then respond to and then commit to funding for that and go forward ... symposium

43:55

Tom: I think if we could also always keep in mind, it always comes down to funding to be able to do stuff, but the Initiative and the Delegation, you know the trip going over, a lot of agencies have made pledges last year, but we have not collected or filled any of those pledges to date, so at this point, we don't have funding for any of the initiatives, Rebecca was able to get funding from other sources, to bring over Dr. Berhe.

44:20

Dan: I would be willing to work on the delegation, in terms of nominating participants and coordinating with relevant parties in Ethiopia

Tom: That's awesome, thank you Dan.

The only thing we would need at this point is someone to help coordinate if everyone thinks it's a good idea, it seemed like we all did, the videotaping of a meeting between Dr. Berhe and some adoptive families. I don't think it needs to be many, just a handful. So, if, I think someone was on from the Bay Area? Are they still on? Bay Area Adoptions? So anyways, we would need a point person on that piece. If there's someone willing to do that then, great. If not, we'll have to walk away from that opportunity, I think.

Chair: Let's think about that. I'd love for someone on the call to step up. But, let's maybe we can reach out to some of the agencies in SF if they're right there. I think what I'm hesitant about is that I don't know the area, I don't have the, you know, so it's kind of, you know, for someone not local to make the arrangements.

Tom: I agree, Deb, if someone from the Bay Area Adoption, or maybe from one of the others, even if they're not doing Ethiopia, could host it at their place, write some families they've worked with. Document it, whatever, with some of you guys

Chair: We know a bunch of families in the area, so we could reach out to families, no problem, to get there. But it's, it's...

Rebecca: I'm sorry I had to walk out for a second. Was there already mention of the potential Tuesday reception?

Chair: No, but I was thinking about that too, Rebecca, collapsing the ...

Rebecca: If there's one thing that's way easier for all of us to organize, it can be hosted at the host site because I'm already working on a site already with the hotel, if families could just come to the event

Chair: I think that would be awesome

Dan: We only need 2 or 3, at the most.

Tom: Exactly, that's really all you need, just to get something. If what we're ... He's a positive force. He's coming to the symposium already. All we need is 5, 10 minutes of video of him talking to a kid and a family.

Chair: Let's try to connect with Bay Area or others offline to make arrangements in the next couple weeks, I think.

Janet (Bay Area Adoption Services): Is this Deb, Deb and Tom? I'm sorry I picked up, and it booted me out of the call, so I had to call back. Feel free to call me. This is Janet from Bay Area Adoption Services. You need to get several families. Is that what you want to do?

Tom: At this point, the plan is to have a reception, which I don't think we've talked about yet on this call, but a separate reception for Dr. Berhe, at that reception, we would need 3, 4, 5 families with different ages of children to come to that reception. And then we would also need someone to hire and pay for a videographer. That's gonna be more expensive than probably producing something in Ethiopia and getting it distributed on TV. Or we just wing it, and somebody videos it with their own little video camera, and hope to goosh that it's you know, usable footage.

Janet: We have an adoptive family with a videographer, but we'll try to see what we can do. When would the reception be? What day would it be?
Separate reception for Dr. Berhe, need videographer, 3 families with different aged children. And when would the reception be?

Chair: Tuesday evening, April 8, 6:30pm.

Janet: Tuesday evening 6:30pm.

49:00

Tom: I have a really hard stop at 4:00 to leave. Can I touch on IAG very briefly and then I'll fade off and you guys can continue on?

Chair: Sure.

Tom: We are getting ready to put out another statement regarding IAG and families. At the end of the day, what it will most likely say, is that we're recommending to families and ASP's - do not attempt to move cases forward until Ethiopian government has completed their investigations. We are getting reports that agencies are taking on families as new clients. Some are doing it very, what we would consider best practices ethically, and some aren't. To the point where we're hearing they're wanting to take on new clients, collect new fees, and not be concerned about legal status of the children or their history. I'm not saying that's anybody on the phone, because we don't even have the majority of the ASP's on this call.

We've talked to just about everybody there is to talk to about this. There's just a lot of concern. Some agencies aren't taking on any of these families. We don't know if the Ethiopian government will allow it. So it's kind of premature there. We don't have a timeline. We don't have conditions on what to do. The State Dept has no idea at this point. Information. With all that uncertainty. And it's just not prudent to move forward.

And the other part that is much more difficult to give guidance on is independent investigations. The reason for that is we've seen it done in Ethiopia to great benefit, kids' families, adoptive families. But in this specific case, we've got to go in with more of a global context. Investigators who come in from government, from UNICEF, from USCIS, when they come to look at a case that has been criminalized, if you've done a previous investigation, there is a possibility that the investigator would consider the case tainted, because there's been contact between the adoptive family and the family of birth, even if it's been indirectly through a private investigator or an attorney. Given that uncertainty, even though it would best practice, we're again asking or suggesting that that not be done until such time that we get the green light from a competent authority in Ethiopia. Saying that would be beneficial and helpful. My guess is that they will end up saying that it's not going to be helpful, please don't do it. But we're the ones who're gonna do it. So that's what we'll probably say. We'll have the language tightened up. Hopefully, next week, we'll have that thing up. With that, I apologize. But I do need to jump off, I have another call that I can't move. So thank you very much for everyone's participation. Deb, and Holland, and Dan's leadership on this, and Rebecca's leadership leadership. So if you guys could just report back to me whatever the conclusion is, I'd appreciate that. Thank you.

Chair: Does anyone have any questions about Tom's position on IAG? I've been hearing personally from a lot of families and I've been sort of echoing what Tom said. Basically the investigations have to happen and we really can't move anywhere, the case can't move anywhere until that happens. But does anyone have any questions, or comments or disagreements or other views on that?

53:

Nicky from Children's Hope: We've also talked to several families too. The last family... We have not taken on any families, again just stating that they need to either do investigations and to wait for something at least was moving in Ethiopia. One family I spoke with said they talked directly to someone at State Dept. Basically told them there was no need to do individual private investigation. Because that's basically, this family was still in PAIR process. That this is basically what the PAIR process would be doing. And once, basically they would need just an agency to work with and then through the PAIR process. But we have not taken on any new cases until something is moving in Ethiopia.

Annie from Children's House International: Families are contacting us. And what we are doing really is, I mean, we do investigate all of our cases before we submit them to PAIR anyway, because PAIR does not conduct an on-the-field investigation. And we have found that sometimes that PAIR does not find what we find on the ground. So, you know, the quote unquote investigation, you know while they're really looking at paperwork is not usually on the field. So we do, just as a due diligence, we want to do our due diligence and to make sure what's on the ground and what's on the paperwork really do match. But, as far as the IAG cases, the way we're looking at them is really case-by-case as far as what Ethiopia's gonna do. I don't think, I don't want to speak on behalf of the Ethiopian government, but I don't think they're going to say, "Just because these families went through IAG, all of these cases are bad". I think it's really going to be mostly the orphanage, not so much the agency. And not all of these cases are from the same orphanage. Some of the orphanages are, it may be that some you might already be working with that specific orphanage. I think you should look at the cases individually. And just see, as long as the US side, you're not in any way harming yourself by taking on these cases as far as the State Dept goes. I don't think, for Ethiopia, it's really going to be more about the orphanages than the agency. So some of the orphanages really are not going to get into any issues with the Ethiopian government, and they have good standing it shouldn't be a problem. And then some of the orphanages really have bad practice and might actually be getting shut down because of IAG, then that might be problematic.

Chair (Wide Horizons): We, at Wide Horizons, we're not willing to take on any of these cases regardless, until the State Dept and the Ethiopian government do whatever investigations they feel like these cases warrant. These are pretty hot cases. There's a lot of questions on the table about these cases. So, we're just not willing to take on any of it until the State Dept and the Ethiopian government do what they need to do.

56:00

Dan: That's Holt's position as well.

Chair: Alright so that's that situation. I think the only other thing that came up that I can see is the PAIR process, and how that's working or not working, if anyone wants to share. We still haven't had any cases come out yet. Of course, we're placing such a few

number of children these days, so we're maybe not be the best measure. But from what I can see, it's taking months for these cases to come out. I don't know other agencies' experiences.

Megan WACAP: I just gonna to say there was a pretty interesting conference call last week, I hope and I believe that many of you participating. I personally found it pretty frustrating, because they talked a lot about being at-capacity with their staffing. That there wasn't enough ability to review the system. Several months in now, it seems like there are a lot of bureaucracy steps that are prolonging the process. I mean it can take more than a month to even be assigned to an officer for review. All the way through recently, we have cases at the Embassy and their side of it, foreign investigation where it's more than a month or roughly a month from the time they say they would like to do an interview with the birth family before they actually have an available time to do so. I think it might be just be actually Rachel herself handling those cases and doing all these interviews. I guess what my question is what can we do as a group to kind of attempt to change. I know we've done this many times now. But I'm very disappointed with the lack of movement. I believe in the PAIR process, I believe in investigations, I believe in doing these things before court. I don't however, feel any kind of good about the time it's taking. You know, we literally kids who are aging out of the system. And you know, I'm terrified every day. I'm wondering if anyone has any comments or ideas about things that could possibly be done to help increase the processing time, or decrease the processing time.

Catherine at Bethany Global: We're also experiencing a lot of delays in Embassy themselves and so forth. It seems like the change of staff each time every 2 years makes a significant difference. And the new staff isn't operating in any way like the last team were. You know our service providers in Ethiopia are asking for advocacy on our end, with the Embassy, obviously with PAIR, particularly with the Embassy in terms of their response time to their emails, accuracy to the emails, sending with agents, sending emails to scheduling. It's causing huge delays for sure.

Megan: There's no complaint, I have had a very good engagement with the Embassy staff, the current staff Rachel and anyone working with her, but it seems really inappropriate that they have 298 cases and 1 person reviewing them. I'm wondering if there's Office of Children's issues or anyone beyond just me emailing and complaining about it. I'd like other people to be involved too.

Dan: We're experiencing the same thing, I always try to see Rachel. And I agree, I think, it just, it's like slogging through mud at this point. This might be a piece that would be a 3rd piece to the "Positioning". Where we are trying to come up with how we can address these issues without getting into a spat with everybody. How can we have these conversations?

Chair: We have 2 of our directors. We have folks traveling to Ethiopia in mid-March. Would it be helpful if we as a collective group put together sort of our collective experience in terms of how long cases are taking, for example start to finish with PAIR at each stage? Would it be helpful for them to meet with Rachel, and just sort of express the collective group's, I don't know, dissatisfaction, or I don't know what the word is, but...

Dan: Or maybe alarm, or just even raising the...

XX: Concern?

Chair: Yes, concern. I think how long it's taking. What's happening in Ethiopia is just one part of it. It's how the 2, the US side and Embassy side, how they're working together. It seems like everything just falls into the black hole. We're literally locked 6 months into this process. It's crazy. Has anyone had smooth processing? Has anyone had pieces go through, I mean, remember when they said it would take 2-3 month window? And has anyone experienced that?

1:01:50

Megan: Yes, we have had a couple of cases, with no RFP, and things have gone through pretty smoothly. But the problem is that that this is not the norm. And I think from the conference call last week, I think they think they are doing a great job, that it's going great. And that they're concerned with the number of RFP at 83% that are coming through. And the list of the reasons why there are RFP's, really look like it's our fault. And I gotta tell you, I travelled in November. And Rachel, who I think has some of the best communication, in years past at the Embassy. So this is nothing against her. But she handed me a list of required documents and what they're looking for and I can see if I can try to find it. But my jaw hit the floor, "Why wasn't this given to us in August in preparation for the starting in September?" And she said, "Oh, you didn't get it?" And I just said, "Please send this out to agencies. Everybody should have this." And I apologize on my end for not sending it out. I can see if I can find it. At this point, it might even be mute, I think they've changed things, I think there are a lot of things that PAIR, that is really not standardized. I could not believe when I was hearing the Embassy/NBC? folks kind of really praise themselves, on how well they're doing, how dedicated they are. It was unbelievable to me.

XX: The 1st few cases back in September went through in 3 months. Then we've had other cases recently, they most take 5 - 6.

1:03:50

Kiersten: I think even the smoothest case at this point for us, it is like slogging through mud. And I do think sometimes, I think there's just a lack of maybe knowledge, or of just an understanding of the reality of what that process looks like for a kid that's not able to be released to go home. And just sort of the time lapse that's there. And it may, like everything, it may be helpful to be able to show tangible examples for how a case realistically went through. And what the repercussions of that was for the child, and even on a paperwork level, to be able to show them examples of cases they have even processed through their own office, to kind of show on more of a macro level on what that's looking like for kids.

Chair: I guess what's hardest for me, is when this all started, there were all of these notions, of you know, they kept reassuring us, "This isn't going to delay. This isn't going to delay again." I never believed it, but that's what we kept hearing. "Oh, the investigation

is just being front-ended. There won't be any delay." But all of this, you know, back and forth between the NBC (USCIS National Benefits Center)?? and the Embassy, all of this takes time, each individual piece is taking time, and the reality is resulting in months of delay. I just think if we could sort of document all of that, and put it all together. And maybe it can't be done as soon as our team is traveling a week from now. Maybe it can be part of the Initiative, of the whole overall Ethiopia Initiative. Maybe it could be sort of part 3, as Dan said.

Megan: Yeah, I wonder if the Embassy is the intended audience of our concerns. Because ...

Chair: It's the NBC.

Megan: Because at the Embassy level. Yeah, it's at the NBC level. And then the one Embassy concern I would have is just the amount of time to even schedule an interview. I mean, we had an email from Rachel saying let's schedule an interview. We respond back with a date when we're ready, and then we get an appointment scheduled for April. I mean, it's insane to me. Because we're just sitting here waiting. When they talk about 2 or 3 months, well, come on, half of that time is just waiting for the interview with the birth family. I think some of it could go to Erin/Aaron Scott (?) or Office of Children's issues, to Rachel herself. But then finding a creative way to talk to the NBC - I would love kind of a Joint Council approach to that.

1:06:45

Chair: Good. Good, good. And you know, so, is that something we could, sort of, put forth, a sort of a sharing of PAIR experience, in concrete things, we could come up with is, if people could submit to us, either here or I'm not sure, at the symposium, sort of how many cases you've had. And what the range of your experiences have been, maybe that would be helpful.

Dan: I would suggest that if someone's willing to take that on, they try to gather that information. And then by the symposium, we're ready to talk about strategy on how to use that information. I agree most of that is most of that is probably back here in the States. But there's no reason why we can't engage with different entities, more proactively.

Nicky at Children's Hope: I don't mind collecting the data if everyone wants to do it.

XX: Oh great.

Dan: We can look at it together. We can really talk at the Symposium about how we want to go forward collectively, and who we should be talking to, and how we do that.

XX: That's really good.

Chair: What I forgot to put on the agenda, but really is an agenda item, is the agenda for the Symposium and we need to start thinking about that as well.

Dan: I think we've identified 3 things.

Chair: We've pushed everything to the Symposium.

Dan: I think where there's a lot to do is before then. But I think, it really is confirming the 3 pieces of the Initiative and really thinking strategically together in terms of moving forward.

Chair: Maybe that should be the whole focus of the Symposium agenda. And this is just my thought, I still think we should gather everyone's you know, opinions on what we need to talk about. But that, to me, is what I think is the most critical thing. If we could spend an hour or 2 together or 3 together - is how to be strategic in our advocacy for adoption, and for these cases and what not.

Dan: Definitely still our caucus time. That's one reason, I wanted to have the reception, is because I feel we all need more time together, even informally. But we have to be intentional about that. So if we have the, I'd be willing to even meet even sooner. I mean the people who are gathering this could meet with the co-chairs we could look at all this and really structure the actual caucus time so that there'll be well-structured by the time we get to the end of the symposium.

Those 3 people who are committed to do things to get ready for the symposium, we could meet on Monday night with the co-chairs. Right?

Tuesday night, we could have the reception, and Wednesday afternoon, we could have our Caucus meeting. That would give us at least some intentionality about moving forward as a group.

1:10

Chair: I like that Dan.

Chair: I'm not sure if everyone who agreed to do things, if they have representation at the Symposium or not.

Nicky (Children's Hope): I'll be there

Dan: I'll be there, I agreed to support the delegation meeting.

Janet: Janet, Shirley, and Andrea Stawitcke, from Bay Area Adoptions will be there also and maybe I can talk to you directly about trying to put the families together and the videography thing.

Chair: OK. We'll have to get together over the next week or so, Janet and Andrea, so that we can do a little bit of thought around that

Janet: Ok, Perhaps we could do some sort of a conference call next week, on a Weds or a Thurs, maybe.

Chair: Sure, sure, sure:

Janet: Tues, Weds, or Thurs, we'll figure it out.

Chair: Perfect. Perfect.

Chair: Great. Is there anything else. This has been great. There's been a lot of great ideas and discussions. Half of the solution is identifying the problem, I think, so, I think we did a pretty good job with that. We have some good plans in place.

Dan: Thank you Debbie.

Chair: Thank everyone on the call, some really great participation. Does anybody have anything else before we sign off?

Chair: Then I guess that's it. Thank you everyone for your participation. Certainly over the next week or so, we'll be actively pushing together as we get to the Symposium.