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ACADEMY OF ADOPTION AND ASSISTED REPRODUCTION ATTORNEYS REACTS TO STATE DEPARTMENT'S INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTIONS REPORT HIGHLIGHTING 82% DECLINE IN NUMBER OF INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTIONS SINCE 2004

(GREENWOOD, INDIANA, MARCH 20, 2019) – The ACADEMY OF ADOPTION AND ASSISTED REPRODUCTION ATTORNEYS (AAAA) is committed to outcomes that are in the best interests of children and has resolved that this goal is best achieved by supporting the protection and security of children and affirming the right of individuals and couples: to adopt children; to serve as foster parents; and to become legal parents of children born through the use of assisted reproductive technology, regardless of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, race, color, age, religion, national origin, political belief, or disability.

On March 14, 2019, the U.S. Department of State (DOS) released its FY 2018 Annual Report on Intercountry Adoptions.¹ The report shows that American families adopted only 4,059 children through intercountry adoption between October 1, 2017 through September 30, 2018. This is a decline of over 13% from the previous year, and over 82% decline since 2004. Since DOS assumed responsibility for the oversight of intercountry adoption in 2008, the number of abandoned, orphaned, and vulnerable children around the world extends into the tens of millions, yet the number of children adopted by American citizens continues to decrease annually under their oversight, to a new historic low of 4,059.

The report fails to put the disastrous decline in perspective: • There are millions of children without families worldwide who will benefit from intercountry adoption and tens of thousands of qualified American families who are willing to adopt them. • The majority of orphans denied intercountry adoption are not finding equal or better solutions in their country of birth; on the contrary, they are living and dying in institutions in ever-growing numbers. Research conclusively shows that the majority of those who survive the orphanage experience will experience permanent emotional and physical harm and will age out into a world that will exploit them in horrible and degrading ways. • There are countries that want to partner with the U.S. to find families for orphans, but unfortunately, the United States is unwilling to work with many countries around the world.

AAAA has advocated that DOS make a full and accurate accounting to Congress, the White House, and the American people for the failing results of their intercountry adoption

¹<https://travel.state.gov/content/dam/NEWadoptionassets/pdfs/Tab%201%20Annual%20Report%20on%20Intercountry%20Adoptions.pdf>

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policies. We continue to try to work collaboratively with DOS to make the intercountry adoption process work better.

Beyond the 2018 Annual Report, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) is considering closing all of its offices abroad. These offices are a key component of processing paperwork related to international adoptions and they help ensure a timely completion of final adoptions. If USCIS offices abroad were to be closed and certain responsibilities transferred to the Department of State, this would undoubtedly delay and deter international adoptions, leaving children and families further in limbo.

“AAAA is deeply concerned about the decline in international adoption, and the State Department’s report is a stark illustration of a troubling trend,” said AAAA President Eric Stovall. “All children deserve a forever family. For children living without families abroad, and families in the United States willing to open their hearts and homes to children abroad, we should be working to strengthen international adoption as an option, among other avenues for these children. Instead, a multitude of factors have conspired to deny children and families this opportunity.

“More immediately,” states Mr. Stovall, “we are dismayed by reports that the Administration is considering closing all USCIS offices abroad. This action will only worsen the decline in international adoption, making the process needlessly longer and create further administrative delay for the unification of children with loving families. AAAA urges USCIS to reverse this decision and call upon Congress to ensure international adoptions remain a way to give children their forever home. Actions such as this, which will only deepen the decline of or create obstacles to family unification, are critical mistakes and will cause lasting harm to international adoption efforts.”