



February 11, 2005

President Vladimir Putin
4, Staraya Square
Moscow 103132
Russian Federation

Dear President Putin:

I would like to take this opportunity to write you and introduce myself and Joint Council on International Children's Services (JCICS) with the hope that we can collaborate together to assist the children of Russia.

Joint Council on International Children's Services (JCICS) is one of the oldest and largest affiliations of licensed, non-profit international adoption agencies, parent support groups, medical clinics and advocacy groups in the world.

JCICS believes that all children – regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, medical limitations or other conditions – deserve permanent, loving homes. When children cannot be cared for in their birth families, or in permanent adoptive homes within their country of birth, we believe that intercountry adoption provides the most positive option for children.

JCICS shares the commitment of the Russian government to strive for best practices in child adoption practices and supports Russia's effort to promote national adoption as a part of the strategy to care for its children. However it is important to ensure that children are provided with **a permanent family**. Both the Hague Adoption Convention, of which both Russia and the United States are signatories, and UNICEF have emphasized the importance of a permanent family. In UNICEF's January 23, 2004 press release they state, "For children who cannot be raised by their own families, an appropriate alternative family environment should be sought in preference to institutional care, which should be used only as a last resort and as a temporary measure. Intercountry adoption is one of a range of care options which may be open to children, and for individual children who cannot be placed in a permanent family setting in their countries of origin, it may indeed be the best solution."

Unfortunately, over the past several months there have been a number of developments in Russia impeding international adoptions. We have concerns that the delayed accreditation process, coupled with the new legislation lengthening the time a child is on

the federal registry to six months, is hindering thousands of children's opportunity to find a permanent family.

Over the past several years Russia's adoption procedures have been strengthened and organized under your leadership. JCICS extends our compliments to you as you have made the needs of children a priority under your administration. It is our hope that international adoption will continue to be a positive option for children in need of permanent families.

As you are well aware, in 2000 Russia required the accreditation of foreign adoption agencies. This enables Russian officials to have oversight of foreign adoption agencies and requires compliance with all domestic laws governing adoption and post-adoption reporting requirements. Approximately 50 U.S. agencies and several European agencies were accredited for a one year period, with renewal applications required annually. Since the government restructuring in the summer of 2004 no accreditation renewals have been issued. It is our understanding that the Ministry of Education and Science ordered the creation of an accreditation commission by the end of December 2004. The accreditation commission will include representatives from the Ministries of Education and Science, Justice, Internal Affairs and Health and Social Development. However, to date the commission has still not been formed. Almost all of the U.S. agencies have expired accreditation and we are concerned that this on-going delay will only extend the time children are in institutional care. We respectfully request that the commission be formed in a timely manner, establish clear criteria for accreditation and begin issuing re-accreditations as soon as possible.

Another current issue we would like to bring to your attention is that of the data bank release letters. From November 2004 to January 10, 2005, the Ministry of Education and Science ceased to sign any letters, thereby putting many adoptions on hold. We understood that the decision to cease signing letters was in part due to the upcoming law change that increased the time a child must be on the national registry from four months to six months. We are pleased that data bank letters are once again being issued, however they are being signed at a very slow and inconsistent pace. According to our information, there are several hundred waiting to be reviewed and signed with only one individual responsible for the task. Due to this slow process, many families and children who are ready to complete their adoption are being forced to wait for an undefined period of time and thus cannot schedule a court date. We respectfully request that a process for expediting the data bank release letters be implemented as soon as possible.

Lastly, it appears that some members of the Duma, specifically Ms. Ekaterina Lakhova, have strong concerns about international adoptions and are recommending a bi-lateral treaty between Russia and the United States. Our understanding is that Ms. Lakhova is concerned that international adoptions are exceeding Russian national adoptions, that the rules governing adoption are being violated, and that there are no efficient means to determine the health and safety of Russian children adopted abroad.

While a bi-lateral treaty may address some of these issues, we believe that there are more efficient means to protect children, adoptive parents and birth parents in both national and international adoption. It is our understanding that since the United States is a signatory to the Hague Convention, it is very unlikely that our government would agree to sign another international treaty governing adoption. As signatories to the

Hague Convention, both the United States and Russia have agreed to support mechanisms that will address the above outlined concerns. We fear that a continued push for another international treaty will, in fact, have the opposite effect of protecting children by further limiting the numbers of children who will have an opportunity to find a permanent family through international adoption.

We do want to emphasize that JCICS supports the promotion of national adoptions; however, it should not be at the expense of restricting international adoptions. Instead all efforts should be made to coordinate both national and international adoption programs to ensure that children are placed in permanent homes as soon as possible, thus significantly reducing their chances of developing life long developmental, emotional and behavioral problems.

It has come to our attention that Ms. Lakhova may be holding a conference in Moscow on the Rights of Children in the next few months. If possible, JCICS would be interested in attending or meeting with members of the Duma and your staff to discuss child welfare and international adoption further. We believe that open dialog is one of the best tools available for addressing areas of mutual concern and developing solutions that are in the best interest of children.

To help facilitate dialog on these and other important issues related to adoption, JCICS would like to take this opportunity to cordially invite you and other Russian officials, to attend a JCICS sponsored event being planned for September 2005 in Washington, DC. In conjunction with the Congressional Coalition Adoption Institute's Angels in Adoption Awards Banquet, we have created the JCICS International Child Welfare Symposium; a goodwill program that will serve to increase dialog and cooperation among countries on the very important issue of child welfare. Meetings with high ranking U.S. government officials will be scheduled as well with medical and behavioral experts to present and discuss particular topics as they relate to international child welfare issues. Other countries may be invited to participate as well for roundtable discussions. We would be honored if representatives of the Russian government would attend this event.

Thank you for your time and kind consideration of our requests.

Sincerely,

Antonia F. Edwardson
Executive Director

CC:

Ambassador Alexander Vershbow
United States Embassy
Bolshoy Deviatinsky Pereulok No. 8
Moscow 121099
Russian Federation - PSC-77, APO AE 09721
(Fax) +7 (095) 728-5090

Ambassador Yuri V. Ushakov
Embassy of the Russian Federation
2650 Wisconsin Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20007
United States
(Fax) 202-298-5735