

Chief Executives of Save the Children UK and World Vision UK respond to Times UK article “The paperwork can wait: everybody wins with adoption”

January 21st 2010

In response to Melanie Reid’s article in the Times, ‘Everybody wins with adoption’

Dear Sir,

The instinct to swoop in and rescue children through international adoption may be a natural impulse but it cannot be the solution for the tens of thousands of children left vulnerable by the Haiti earthquake. Although it is unclear at the moment how many children have been separated from their families, the possibility of a child being scooped up and mistakenly labelled an orphan in the chaotic aftermath of the disaster is incredibly high.

Long experience has taught organisations like ours that it is almost always in the best interests of a child to remain with their relatives and extended families. UN guidelines recommend at least two years are spent tracing lost families before adoption should be considered. These protocols might seem cumbersome but they are the best way to protect children. Previous experience of disasters has led to heart-breaking cases where children have been adopted, even though later it emerges that surviving relatives have been desperate to care for them. In Haiti now, no matter how horrific the situation looks to concerned observers, the full process of reuniting children with parents and relatives must be completed.

While the adoptions of children from Haiti whose full legal documents were completed prior to the disaster should certainly go ahead, Save the Children and World Vision are calling for an immediate moratorium on any new adoptions of children from the country to ensure every child has been given the best possible chance of being reunited with their family. The impulse to help is natural but the best help for the vast majority of Haiti's children will be to enable them to rebuild their lives surrounded by the love and support of their families and relatives.

Jasmine Whitbread, Chief Executive, Save the Children UK
Justin Byworth, Chief Executive, World Vision UK

This letter is response to the Times UK Online article, “The paperwork can wait: everybody wins with adoption” dated January 21, 2010. The full letter can be read through the link below.

http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/melanie_reid/article6995752.ece