



Attachment & Trauma Network, Inc.

April 13, 2010

The Honorable Hillary Clinton
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton:

We were deeply saddened to hear of the Hansen family's action to return Artyom Savelyev to Russia. Deeply saddened, but not surprised. The Attachment & Trauma Network (ATN), receives calls every week from desperate families needing immediate resources and support to deal with their children's significant emotional dysfunctions, related to trauma and attachment. These are adoptive and foster parents who are very close to acting out of desperation to protect themselves and their family members.

We cannot condone the Hansen family's actions, but our members can certainly understand them. Thankfully, most children do not experience trauma to the extent our children have. That is why it is so hard to convey how overwhelming it is to parent a child who was severely traumatized by abuse and neglect— a child whose behaviors often present a physical danger to themselves or their family at any moment. Parents go into adoption with the best of intentions, and are filled with hope that they will bring love to a child's life and that love will heal any past wounds. Few pre-adoptive parents can imagine a child who sets fires, self-injures, tortures animals, threatens family members, or rages uncontrollably. Yet, children coming from backgrounds of abuse, neglect, and maltreatment (including some raised in institutions) are at high risk for attachment-disordered behaviors.

We hope this incident will spark a debate on the needed reform of international adoption and post-adoption resources. Time and again, families find no meaningful post-adoptive follow-up or support from any source. Parents who tell their agencies of these troubling behaviors, or ask the agencies for help, are often ignored, given inadequate resources, or worse yet, told that they are at fault. Few are offered additional training, support groups, or access to therapies. Post-adoptive placement reports frequently downplay the issues the parents tell agencies they are facing. Parents are encouraged to understate the issues so that future international adoptions are not put in jeopardy.

Further, the information disclosed to a family about a child's history from their birth country is often inadequate and in-country medical exams are cursory at best. Those specializing in the treatment of attachment and trauma admit that determining which traumatized children will have these violent behaviors and emotional problems is very difficult. Yet, families frequently find out after the adoption takes place that their children have in fact endured incidents of abuse and



neglect or have exhibited patterns of violent, self-injurious or disturbing behaviors that were never communicated to them.

ATN urges the US State Department to develop policies that will protect these traumatized children along with the families who are seeking to help them. Otherwise it becomes a double tragedy—much like the Hansens' case.

ATN is a parent-led, all-volunteer organization providing what support, education and advocacy we can to families of traumatized children in crisis. Our services are limited to peer-to-peer support groups, education on attachment and trauma issues through online courses and a newsletter, and a database of treatment resources. And we are virtually alone in this effort as the lack of therapists and professionals specializing in attachment issues causes families in crisis to travel across the country, spending thousands of dollars to obtain services not available to them locally or covered by their limited insurance plans. The financial and emotional strain on these families is enormous and can be devastating for those families who struggle alone.

Although adoption professionals report that most adoptions turn out well, too many are failing because of a lack of awareness and support.. There is no safety net for these families, especially those adopting internationally who are not able to access state social services.

Secretary Clinton, we know you to be a staunch advocate for children and families. We look forward to working with you and your staff on developing ways to build the needed support for families of traumatized international adoptees.

Sincerely,

ATTACHMENT & TRAUMA NETWORK, Inc.

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