

## **SUSPENSION OF ADOPTIONS FROM GUATEMALA**

### **The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children, Young People and Families (Mr. Kevin Brennan):**

I am today announcing a suspension of adoptions of Guatemalan children by UK residents in response to concerns about adoption practice in Guatemala. The suspension takes effect immediately.

We have had long-standing concerns about the adoption process in Guatemala, as evidenced by the imposition of additional procedural checks administered by the British Embassy in Guatemala and the UK's objection to Guatemala's accession to the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in respect of Intercountry Adoption in 2003.

I am now introducing a suspension of adoptions in response to new evidence which demonstrates that: there are insufficient safeguards in the Guatemalan adoption system to prevent children being adopted without proper consents being given and improper financial gain being made by individuals in the adoption process. In particular that: there is a trade in babies being sold for overseas adoption; and mothers are being paid, or otherwise encouraged, to give up children for adoption. Such practices are, of course, contrary to the principles of the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in respect of Intercountry Adoption and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

I have given careful consideration to the position of UK prospective adopters currently in the process of adopting from Guatemala. I have decided that the suspension will take effect at the point when a Certificate of Eligibility is sent to Guatemala by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (or in a Northern Ireland case by the Department for Health, Social Services and Public Safety for Northern Ireland). This is the last point in the application process administered by the DCSF (or the DHSSPS).

Applications already sent to Guatemala will not be prevented from proceeding in the usual way (subject, of course, to the usual checks), but only in exceptional circumstances will I consider that any other application may proceed. A decision about any application for an exception to the suspension will take account of the best interests of the child and all the facts of the particular case.

I understand that the Guatemala authorities intend to legislate so as to implement the Hague Convention in the coming months, but I consider that the nature of the information currently held means we must act now. I will, of course, consider the effect on the ground of any changes to adoption legislation and practice in Guatemala, in keeping the suspension under review.