

The Hague Convention sets forth standards and procedures that can be recognized and followed by countries involved with inter-country adoptions. This legal framework provides protection to the adoptive children and their families by ensuring that agencies and individuals involved in the intercountry adoption process meet standards of competence, ethical behavior and financial soundness.

Americans are widely engaged in international adoptions. American adopted over 13,000 children international in 1997. By adopting the system developed by the Hague Convention, we can ensure that these adoptions are completed with a minimal risk of fraud, child abuse or illegal child trafficking.

Mr. Speaker, this bill adheres to two important principles. First, the legislation fully meets the requirements of the Hague Convention without attempting to reach beyond those requirements. Secondly, the bill does not override state laws on adoption except where it is absolutely necessary to conform with the Hague Convention.

Under our bill, the State Department will monitor intercountry adoption cases and liaise with foreign governments on behalf of adoptive parents. In addition, State will maintain a case registry to track all adoptions involving immigration of a child into the U.S. and all adoptions involving emigration from the U.S. to any other Convention country.

The bill also designates the Department of Health and Human Services with the responsibility of accrediting adoption service providers. In allows for HHS to designate one or more private, non-profit organizations to serve as accrediting entities. The bill also provides oversight authority and prescribes actions that can be taken by the Secretary of HHS should an accrediting agency or an accredited entity fail to comply with the standards.

My intention is to promptly move ahead with this legislation and the International Relations Committee plans to hold hearings on this legislation in the near future. I greatly appreciate the interest and assistance provided by my colleagues in crafting this bill. I look forward to working with House members as we move this bill forward.

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INTRODUCTION OF THE  
INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION OF 1999

**HON. DAVE CAMP**

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, September 22, 1999*

Mr. CAMP. Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to join with my friend and colleague, the Chairman of the House International Relations Committee BENJAMIN GILMAN, in introducing the Intercountry Adoption Act of 1999, legislation to implement the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption. His leadership on this important issue is a testament to his concern for the safety and well-being of children looking forward to permanent and loving adoptive families.

More and more, American couples are looking abroad as they seek to expand their families through adoption. The United States adopts more children than any other country.

We're the land of opportunity, in so many ways, and intercountry adoption is yet another example of that fact. As the world's leader in adopting children of other countries, we have a responsibility to ensure that intercountry adoption take place in a way that guarantees the children's safety and fully protects the rights of both the adoptive parents and the birth parents.

For that reason, the United States in 1994 signed the Hague Intercountry Adoption Convention, which establishes basic international procedures for concluding safe intercountry adoptions. We've heard too many stories about the small minority of unscrupulous agencies and individuals who have bridled parents or foreign officials, deceived prospective adoptive parents about the costs of an adoption or actually who the child is that they are adopting, and even stories about the selling of children. Though such horror stories are a small minority, we need to ensure that international standards are in place so only competent and law-abiding agencies and individuals are involved in intercountry adoptions.

The Intercountry Adoption Act, which we are introducing today, implements the Hague Convention. The bill's first main provision would establish the State Department as a "Central Authority," to monitor intercountry adoptions and provide assistance to adoptive parents in dealing with officials in other countries.

Secondly, the bill calls for the Department of Health and Human Services to designate one or more private, non-profit organizations to serve as accrediting bodies which would then accredit U.S. adoption service providers in accordance with strict standards of ethics, competence, and financial soundness. These accredited agencies could then facilitate intercountry adoptions in other countries under the Hague Treaty.

Mr. Speaker, we can be proud of our success domestically, in increasing adoptions here in the U.S. and decreasing the time many of our children spend in foster care. Our 1997 legislation, the Adoption and Safe Families Act, has led to enormous increases in domestic adoptions. The Intercountry Adoption Act takes the next step, to ensure that international adoptions are safe, and that they are in the best interests of the child, the birth parents, and the adoptive parents. I look forward to working with Chairman GILMAN and other Members of Congress interested in international adoption, and I urge my colleagues to join us in supporting this important legislation.

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PROTECTING CHILDREN IN  
INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTIONS

**HON. SAM GEJDENSON**

OF CONNECTICUT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, September 22, 1999*

Mr. GEJDENSON. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the Inter-Country Adoption Act of 1999, bipartisan legislation that has been introduced today. This legislation, of which I am an original co-sponsor, seeks to implement the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (the "Hague Convention"), which the

President transmitted to the Senate for its advice and consent on June 11, 1999.

For many years, children from across the world have found loving and nurturing homes here in the United States. American families have opened their arms to these needy children who might otherwise have remained orphans in their own countries. Likewise, while fewer in number, U.S. children are also placed with foreign nationals who seek to grow their families through adoption. And yet, amid the many shining examples of successful intercountry adoptions, there remain a substantial amount of cases where the results have not been as positive. For this reason, it is absolutely imperative that we take prompt action to ratify and implement the Hague Convention here in the United States—above all, to protect the rights of, and prevent abuses against, children, birth families and adoptive parents involved in inter-country adoptions. The Convention provides a legal framework whereby agencies and individuals would be required to meet internationally agreed upon standards of competence, financial soundness and ethical behavior.

The legislation before you today would also ensure that such adoptions are indeed in the children's best interests. Among other matters, it establishes a central point of contact for intercountry adoptions under the Convention, provides for minimum standards for agencies and other persons involved in facilitating intercountry adoptions, and includes stiff civil and criminal penalties for anyone involved in misconduct such as fraud relating to intercountry adoptions. Through these and other mechanisms, this bill would facilitate the Federal Government's efforts to assist U.S. citizens seeking to adopt children from abroad and residents of other Convention countries seeking to adopt children from the United States. At the same time, this bill seeks to achieve these objectives in a way that would not preempt state law except to the minimum extent necessary.

There is no reason why we should not take this important step towards safeguarding the rights of needy children, their birth parents and adoptive families. We must work together to strengthen international cooperation in adoption cases and do everything within our power to prevent abuses. I want to commend Chairman GILMAN for his work in introducing this legislation, the many members who worked together to fashion a bipartisan bill, and all members who have joined us as original co-sponsors of this legislation.

Please join me in pledging your support for the Inter-Country Adoption Act of 1999.

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HAGUE INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION  
ACT

**HON. TOM BLILEY**

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, September 22, 1999*

Mr. BLILEY. Mr. Speaker, I am a proud co-sponsor of the Hague Intercountry Adoption Act introduced today on behalf of thousands of children and adoptive families. After months of work, this bill represents a bipartisan approach