

Investigation by I.N.S. Delays Obtaining Visas and Snarls Adoptions in Vietnam

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Body

For nearly two years, Lisa C. Kombrink and Jesse Camacho did everything they could to **adopt** a child. They navigated mounds of paperwork, exposed their marriage to the scrutiny of social workers, and waited.

Finally, on Dec. 9, they arrived in Hanoi, **Vietnam**, from their Suffolk County home in East Quogue and were handed the baby they had decided to name Gabriel.

But in the weeks that followed, something went wrong. Instead of receiving a **visa** from the State Department that was required to bring Gabriel back to America, the couple got a thick packet at their hotel in early January from the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service, informing them that no **visa** would be forthcoming, at least for now.

It turned out the Vietnamese agency that was helping out with the **adoption** was being investigated by the **I.N.S.** Seven other couples who had **adopted** children through the same agency were also left in the lurch. They were the legal parents of a child they fell in love with when they first saw his picture, but they could not bring him home.

"You can imagine being only days away from being flown back to the United States and being told, 'No, you can't be a parent in your own country,' " Ms. Kombrink said. "I can't tell you the heartbreak and the anger at hearing that terrible news."

She returned to America on Jan. 9 to press her case and tend to her law practice. Mr. Camacho, a self-employed woodworker, and 13-month-old Gabriel are still at the Evergreen Hotel in Ho Chi Minh City, in a room overlooking a street busy with scooters and taxis.

"It's just so frustrating," Ms. Kombrink said. "I waited so long to become a mother. I became a mother, and then I had my son torn away from me."

At a news conference today, Senator Charles E. Schumer called on the **I.N.S.** to grant the eight families **visas** to bring their nine **adopted** children -- one family **adopted** two -- home. "They say this agency isn't doing things correctly. I say, Fine, investigate," Mr. Schumer said. "But don't hold these families in limbo."

Jill Cole, director of international **adoptions** at Spence-Chapin Services to Families and Children, the Manhattan **adoption** agency that assisted Ms. Kombrink and Mr. Camacho, defended the Vietnamese agency in question, the International Mission of Hope. "We know them very, very well, and they're a wonderful agency," Ms. Cole said.

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A spokesman for the immigration service, Bill Strassberger, said officials had found "irregularities" in the adoption process and did not intend to approve the visas without investigating each case.

"We've had a history of children being approved for adoption by foreign governments, only to find the birth mother showing up afterwards looking for the child," Mr. Strassberger said. "We're not doing this maliciously. This is being done to protect everyone involved -- the child, the birth mother and the adoptive parents."

But Irene Recio, a lawyer in the Washington office of Baker & McKenzie who is representing International Mission of Hope as well as the eight families stranded at the Evergreen Hotel, said the immigration service has not presented any information indicating anything was wrong in these cases.

"I don't care whether there's been wrongdoing in the past," Ms. Recio said. "If you're going to keep these babies from coming into the U.S., the I.N.S. must present credible, reliable, accurate evidence."

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