

**Statement for Senator Mary Landrieu**  
**Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs**

**Hearing on Asian Adoptions to the United States**

Ms Chairman, thank you for holding this very timely hearing on International Adoption in Asian Countries. I am honored to sit on this panel with my fellow Congressional Coalition on Adoption Co-Chair, Senator Larry Craig. I would also like to thank the United States Department of State, the United States Department of Homeland Security, the National Council for Adoption and Holt International for being here today. I know that we are all here today because we know that every child deserves a family.

More and more Americans are creating families by adopting children from foreign countries. In 2004, more than 23,000 children were adopted from abroad. As you know, the largest numbers of children adopted from other countries by United States citizens have been from Asia. 7,033 children were adopted from China, 1, 708 from South Korea and 709 from Vietnam.

As an advocate of adoption, I am always looking for ways to increase diplomatic relations in order to facilitate future international adoptions. As you know, adopting a child from another country is a process filled with obstacles to overcome. I remain committed to continuing to work to break down these obstacles so that children can be connected to families more quickly. I firmly believe that in the past the United States and Asian countries have long been a model for transparent adoptions.

When I traveled to China in January of 2001, the Chinese government discussed with me way to make adoption from China to the United States a more transparent process. The Director of the China Center of Adoption Affairs, Director Lu Ying made two suggestions for the United States to make the process easier. The first is to move the United States State Department from Guanjo to Beijing. At the present time, adoptive parents must go to Beijing and Guanjo in order for an adoption to take place. This process is unnecessary and time consuming. The second suggestion was that a review of all documents coming from the United States must take place. In 2002, Director Lu came to Washington, DC to alert Congress that the Chinese government realized that identical home studies were being sent by certain adoption agencies for different individuals wanting to adopt. These suggestions were then passed on to State Department. To my knowledge, these issues have not been addressed.

As a result, the increased waiting time for adoptions from China has happened quickly and has had dramatic effects. Many prospective adoptive parents are contacting my office and CCAI, the Institute for the Congressional Coalition on Adoption, to express their concerns about the slow down in China's adoption process. Yesterday, CCAI received more than 200 emails from families asking us to extend the expiration date from 18 months to 24 months due to the slow down in China.

Today, there are thousands of U.S. families facing the real possibility of having to be re-finger printed then re-applying for their 1-171H approval. This means redoing not only their homestudy, but also providing the necessary paperwork such as marriage licenses, birth certificates, and in most often a new medical evaluation. The costs associated with updating

documents and the homestudy adds at least \$2,000 to the already expensive price tag of international adoption. This means that as many as 12,000 families involved in China adoptions per year will need to reprocess paperwork if there are no changes to the current expiration dates. Additionally, we all know that the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services offices are stretched thin with work load, increasing the expiration date will help alleviate some of that work load. During their testimony, I would ask if Ms. Berry and/or Mr. Devine could share with us how USCIS and the State Department are planning to address this issue.

Secondly, I would like to address the issue of civil registry in some Asian countries. It may be difficult for the United States and these Asian countries to participate in international adoptions if they do not have proper birth certificates. Parental rights cannot be given up if there is little or no knowledge as to whom the orphan's parents are. If the government is not able to prove that they are abandoned, it therefore makes the child ineligible for adoption. I would like to pursue the development of a legislative solution for civil registries if possible. I look forward to working with the Chinese government on this issue.

Lastly, I would like to discuss the United States foreign policy as it relates to children. I am very proud of our government's policy that promotes permanency for children and families. I am, however, worried that our foreign aid and foreign policy do not line up. Much of our foreign aid only goes to children who are orphaned rather than toward permanent family placement. In some cases, parents who cannot afford to care for their children must put their children in orphanages, so they can receive aid from the United States. Programs that support low income families, placement for children, and adoption awareness are those that I would like to see the United States promote. It would be useful to realize how much funding goes to what types of programs and if these programs are consistent with the policies that the United States promotes. To further these objections, knowing a centralized office would make it easier to access this information and would eliminate much of the red tape and paperwork associated with foreign adoption. This would also enable the U.S. State Department to provide greater diplomatic representation and proactive advocacy in the area of international adoption. The Intercountry Adoption Reform Act of 2006 would do just that. It is my hope that it is included as a part of H.R. 4437.

The last several years have shown us that when we have the political will and the resources we can ensure that tens of thousands of children find a permanent, loving family with their birth families, relative caregivers or adoptive parents. Many Asian countries have long been the model for international adoptions. Let us try to continue to promote that transparency so that all children can grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding. Thank you again for inviting me to be a part of this panel. Please do not hesitate to contact me or the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute with any further questions.