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## Ethiopia

April 12, 2012

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### Notice: Summary of Adoption Service Provider Meeting with the U.S. Embassy

*In response to several requests for written summaries of the adoption service provider meetings held by the U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa, the Office of Children's Issues posts this notice to provide interested parties with information discussed at the most recent meeting on April 18, 2012. These meetings take place several times a year and are announced to in-country representatives in advance. This notice recaps the issues discussed; however, the Office of Children's Issues has inserted, in italicized text, links to further information on worldwide policies pertaining to issues discussed during the meeting.*

#### **Fee change from \$404 to \$230**

U.S. non-immigrant and immigrant visa application fees have changed as of April 13, 2012. The fee for Immediate Relative and family preference applications (processed on the basis of an approved I-130, I-600 or I-800 petition) decreased from **\$404 to \$230**. All visa applicants must pay the fees in effect on the day of the payment, not on the day of the visa interview. Therefore, anyone who has already paid the combined \$404 fee will not receive a refund even if the fee decreased by the time of their visa interview.

*For further information, please refer to the press release issued by the Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson, on March 29, 2012, regarding [visa processing fees](#). The change reduced the immigrant visa application fee from \$330 to \$230 and eliminated the \$74 immigrant visa application surcharge.*

#### **Escort cases**

If at least one of the adoptive parents met the child in Ethiopia before the court hearing, the family may choose to have someone else escort the child to the United States. The escort will still be required to present a Power of Attorney allowing him/her to act on behalf of the adoptive parent(s), represent them at the visa interview, and escort the child through U.S. Customs and Border Protection at the U.S. Port of Entry.

#### **Ethiopian entry visas**

We have heard that the Government of Ethiopia is considering discontinuing "visas on arrival" at Bole International Airport, but no policy change has been announced. We recommend all U.S. citizens obtain an entry visa from an Ethiopian embassy or consulate in advance of travel.

*The U.S. Department of State will post public notices on [adoption.state.gov](#) and [travel.state.gov](#) upon receiving official notification of any change in entry requirements for U.S. citizens. For current travel information, please review the [Ethiopia Country Specific Information](#) on the Department of State website.*

#### **Screening backlog**

We are pleased to announce that we have cleared our screening backlog and the current time for screening new cases is two business days. We have also increased the number of available birth relative interview slots, and the current wait time for a birth relative interview is one week.

#### **Expedited processing**

We will consider on a case-by-case basis expeditious processing for children

with serious medical conditions that require urgent treatment that is unavailable in Ethiopia. Cases involving children who have serious but stable medical conditions or who are already undergoing treatment in Ethiopia generally do not qualify for expeditious processing. Medical conditions like asthma or HIV/AIDS, which are common reasons for requesting expedited processing, would not typically qualify for expeditious processing.

Expedited cases are not exempt from the required review of orphan status through the Form I-604, Determination on Child for Adoption. We encourage all agencies to inform us as early as possible about cases involving children with serious medical conditions requiring urgent treatment that is unavailable in Ethiopia, even at the time of referral.

#### **Processing of the *Not Clearly Approvable (NCA)* cases**

U.S. Embassy Addis Ababa has a limited, delegated authority from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to adjudicate Form I-600 petitions filed in Ethiopia, which includes a determination that the child meets the definition of an orphan under U.S. law. If the Consular Officer determines a case is not clearly approvable, Department of State is required by regulation to forward the case to USCIS. In recent months we have noticed that the processing time of the cases sent to Nairobi averages three weeks or less.

*Please note this is an average processing time. Processing times are dependent on the specifics of a case and therefore highly variable.*

Please note that the adoptive parent's Form I-600A must be valid at the time the

#### **Petition**

is filed. Additionally, the fingerprint clearances for the adoptive parents and all adult household members must be valid at the time the petition is approved, not at the time of the visa interview. For petitions approved by USCIS Nairobi or within the United States, we can still process the child's visa application even if the fingerprint clearances and/or Form I-600A have expired.

#### **Police and birth relative interviews as part of the Form I-604 investigation**

Our office conducts birth relative interviews for most relinquishment cases, and conducts interviews with local officials and police for most abandonment cases. The purpose of these interviews is to confirm the child's orphan status and, in relinquishment cases, to ensure that the relinquishing parent or family member fully understands the relinquishment process. During these interviews, we continue to encounter birth relatives who have been told that a child will return to Ethiopia at the age of 18.

When informed that intercountry adoption is a permanent severing of a familial relationship and that there should be no expectation of the child's return, birth relatives often become very emotional. We conduct birth relative interviews in our privacy booth for the relative's privacy and comfort. In order to prevent significant delays in processing, we encourage all Adoption Service Providers to notify us in advance if a birth relative will be late or unable to appear on the appointment date.

#### **Pre-Adoption Immigration Review**

The U.S. Embassy continues to work with the Government of Ethiopia to implement a "pre-screening process" wherein consular officers and USCIS will review adoption petitions prior to the Ethiopian court hearing. We hope to have more information for agencies in the near future.

#### **General Discussion - Trends in the Ethiopian adoption.**

1. A rise in the number of abandonments vs. relinquishments.
2. Groups of children being relinquished from the same community at the same time.
3. Adoption contracts being signed before the child is relinquished.

