

ADOPTION: LOOKING FOR A BABY ABROAD

Introduction



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Focus

It is not easy to adopt a baby in Canada. There are more children available to adopt in other countries, such as China, Africa, and Central America, so although it is expensive—and complicated—more and more Canadians are turning to international adoption to build their families. In this *News in Review* story, we will follow one Manitoba woman as she travels to Kazakhstan to adopt a baby girl.

For some childless people, it is the answer to their prayers. With the number of healthy babies eligible for adoption in Canada declining, and wait times for the few who are available frequently long, many couples or individuals wanting to adopt are looking abroad to complete their families. Although international adoption is a complicated and often very expensive procedure, it is popular because it can be quicker than domestic adoption, and the number of supposedly healthy newborn babies available in other countries is far greater than it is in Canada.

Many people in Canada see international adoption not only as a way of having their own child, but as a way to rescue orphans living in Third World countries from a life of poverty and suffering. Touched by graphic television images of the destitution and squalor in which many of the world's children grow up, people wanting to adopt are spending large sums of money—and travelling to faraway places—in order to find their new children, bring them into their homes, and offer them new and better lives in Canada. Celebrities such as Madonna and Angelina Jolie have

travelled the globe to adopt children from poor countries, which has raised the profile of international adoption.

Because of the complexity and expense of international adoption, a number of private agencies have sprung up to meet the rising demand for this service. The bankruptcy of one of these agencies—Imagine Adoption of Cambridge, Ontario, in the summer of 2009—made headlines across Canada and left hundreds of potential adoptive families in the lurch when it went out of business. This example raised concerns about the business practices of these agencies and led to calls for greater government regulation and oversight of their affairs.

International adoption is a process that can involve months of uncertainty and frustrating technicalities and may also require under-the-table payments to expedite the adoption. This is because some of the countries where international adoptions occur also happen to be among the most corrupt in the world. But despite these challenges, international adoption is worth the chance for many Canadians who feel this is their last chance to become a parent.

To Consider

1. Should Canadians adopt internationally when there are Canadian children who need adoptive parents? Why or why not?
2. Do you believe that Hollywood stars who adopt internationally have an influence on the general public? Is this a good thing or not?

ADOPTION: LOOKING FOR A BABY ABROAD

Video Review

Further Research

The Government of Canada provides information for those considering international adoption. Visit the Web site at www.cic.gc.ca/english/immigrate/adoption/index.asp to see what you can learn.

Pre-viewing Activity

Before you watch the video, discuss the following questions with a partner or in a small group.

1. What do you know about the process of international adoption?
2. What celebrities have made news by travelling to poor countries to adopt orphaned children? What was the reaction to this in the media?
3. What do you think are the pros and cons of international adoption?
4. Why do you think more couples in Canada are turning to international adoption as a way of finding newborn babies to complete their families?
5. Why do you think international adoption is becoming more popular than domestic adoption (adopting a child already living in Canada)?

Viewing Questions

Watch the video and answer the following questions.

1. Why did Glen Pearson and Jane Roy decide to adopt a child in Sudan?

2. What surprise did they encounter when they returned to Sudan?

3. What new things have Pearson and Roy's new Sudanese children discovered since coming to Canada?

4. Why is it easier to find a newborn baby available for adoption in a foreign country than it is in Canada?

5. Why was Madonna's adoption of two babies in Malawi so controversial?

6. Where did Lindsay Drummond look for a new baby? Why did she decide not to try to adopt a child from her home province?

7. How much money did she have to spend on adoption fees? Why was it difficult to transport this money from Canada?

8. What problem did she immediately face upon arrival?

9. What kind of children did she find available for adoption in the orphanages she visited?

10. What complications arose after she finally found a baby she wished to adopt?

11. Why was her reunion with her new child before bringing her back to Canada disappointing?

12. What possible medical problems may she face with her new child?

Post-viewing Activities

After you have watched the video, discuss and respond to the following questions. Your teacher may choose to place you in a small group with other students.

1. What do you think would be the most difficult challenge in adopting children from war-torn and impoverished countries?

2. If you were a friend of Lindsay Drummond's, would you have supported her decision to travel to Kazakhstan and spend tens of thousands of dollars to adopt a baby? Explain.

3. Why do you think countries like Kazakhstan are permitted to conduct international adoption procedures in such an apparently corrupt manner?

4. What challenges do you think Drummond and her child Emerson will face in their new lives in Manitoba?

ADOPTION: LOOKING FOR A BABY ABROAD

Adoption in Canada

Did you know . . .

Adoption is expensive. People looking for an adoptive child born in Canada through a private agency can expect to spend from \$15 000 to \$25 000. For an American or other foreign-born child, the cost can range anywhere from \$25 000 to \$50 000.

Further Research

The Adoption Council of Canada offers how-to-adopt seminars and resources for individuals and families considering adoption. Visit their Web site at www.adoption.ca.

The process of adopting a child in Canada is a provincial matter, and the requirements and regulations differ widely from one province to the next. According to Canada Adopts—the country’s only online adoption meeting place—“change seems to be the only constant” when it comes to the issue of adoption today. Factors such as the rising popularity of international adoption and the availability of new search tools like the Internet have altered the face of adoption.

Who is eligible?

Generally speaking, anyone over the age of 18 who is a Canadian citizen or a landed immigrant and does not have a criminal record is a potential candidate to adopt a child. Quebec and Newfoundland are the exceptions to this, as the minimum age to adopt there is 25. Adoptive parents must prove that they have adequate income to provide for their own needs and those of their prospective child. In the case where a special-needs child is adopted, the government provides an additional adoption subsidy to the family to help them provide the extra care he or she may require.

Who is available?

One widely held belief is that there are very few children available for adoption in Canada. This is why many people turn to international adoption as an alternative to pursuing the process of domestic adoption. But according to the Adoption Council of Canada, there are more than 20 000 children living in foster homes across Canada whose birth parents have relinquished their parental rights to them and are therefore eligible to be

adopted. However, few of these children are newborn babies, and a number of them suffer from serious physical or mental disabilities such as fetal alcohol syndrome. In some cases, siblings living in foster homes are required to be adopted by the same family in order to allow them to remain together. Such children, unfortunately, may not be as strong candidates for adoption as healthy newborns.

The two main paths to domestic adoption in Canada are public and private. Public adoptions are administered by public or government bodies such as the Children’s Aid Society, while private adoptions are managed through an agency that finds an eligible child for prospective parents. There is no cost for public adoption, whereas a private adoption agency may charge a substantial fee for matching adoptive parents with the kind of child they desire, especially a newborn baby.

How long does it take?

A couple looking for a healthy newborn baby may have to wait as long as eight years through the public adoption process, while the wait time for such a child through a private alternative may be much shorter. This is because birth mothers often prefer to place their babies with private agencies rather than government bodies. Private agencies often allow birth mothers to be involved in the selection of adoptive parents for their child.

The Adoption Process

One important requirement that prospective adoptive parents must complete is the home study, an assessment of their parenting skills.

Once the home study has been approved, a child can be placed with his or her adoptive parents for a probationary period. During this time, an adoption practitioner visits the family occasionally in order to assess how well the parent or parents and child are adapting to the situation and bonding with each other. Once the probationary period is over, and the practitioner feels that the adoptive family is functioning well, then the adoption can be regarded as permanent.

The requirements that prospective adoptive parents must satisfy in Canada today are in general much less stringent than they were in the past. Single people, gays and lesbians, and older childless couples may now adopt children—whereas in the past they frequently faced barriers to achieving their goal. However, the domestic shortage of healthy newborns, the most popular choice for adoptive parents, has led many people to look to international adoption as the solution to completing their families with a new baby.

The most important thing for people considering adopting a child in Canada

or abroad to remember is that it is a major commitment and a permanent decision, one that will have a significant impact on their own lives and those of any other family members, for good or for ill. Some individuals and couples facing issues such as aging and infertility act hastily to “fix” the problem by adopting a child. But it is important that people not permit their emotions to overrule their judgment; and that is why adoption agencies manage the adoption process in Canada. However, agencies involved in international adoption may not carefully screen childless people or properly prepare them for the parenting tasks they will face once they bring their child to Canada.

Sources: “How do I adopt a child?” www.adoption.ca/AboutAdoption_How.html; “FAQs”, Canada Adopts, www.canadaadopts.com/cgi-bin/print.cgi; “Pros and cons of public domestic adoption: Factors to consider when adopting a child from within Canada,” http://adoption.suite101.com/print_article.cfm/pros_and_cons_of_public_domestic_adoption

Activities

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of public and private adoption in Canada? Which alternative would you pursue if you wanted to adopt a child? Why?
2. Why has international adoption become more popular than domestic adoption in Canada over the past few years?

ADOPTION: LOOKING FOR A BABY ABROAD

International Adoption

Did you know . . .

In 1979, in an attempt to curb population growth, the Chinese government introduced a “one-child family policy” for urban families. Those living in rural areas can have more than one child, and there are certain circumstances where urban couples can as well. But urban couples have to be granted permission to have more than one child.

For a growing number of Canadians, international adoption is becoming the method of choice for adding a new and much-wanted member to their families. Over the past decade, statistics show a dramatic rise in foreign adoptions by Canadian individuals and couples, with an average of about 2 000 children arriving from overseas every year.

Because international adoption is becoming so popular—not only in Canada but also in the United States and many Western European countries—it is now regulated under the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Inter-country Adoptions, which Canada signed in 1993. The main goals of the Hague Convention are the protection of the best interests of adopted children, the standardization of adoption processes between countries, and the prevention of child abuse (particularly the trafficking of children). In order for someone to be eligible to adopt a child from another country, he or she must satisfy both the adoption requirements of his or her own province as well as those of the home country of the adoptive child.

For many years, China has been the most popular source for Canadians seeking to adopt a child internationally. With its large population, China has a sizeable number of children eligible for adoption, especially girls, because family size for urban couples has been limited to one child by the government’s “one child” policy. In China, there is a cultural preference for male children, so female babies are frequently put up for adoption.

Changes in China

In 2007 China began to tighten its requirements for potential foreign adoptive parents after signing the Hague Convention. The one-child policy is in

the process of being revised, and the growing Chinese middle class is now more interested in adopting baby girls born in that country. In addition, there is a rising nationalistic sentiment in China that believes that children born in the country should not be removed from their traditional language, culture, and customs.

The new policies impose strict requirements that adoptive parents from outside China must meet. These include having a family net worth of \$100 000, being of average weight, and being between the ages of 30 and 40. Special-needs children can be adopted by people up to the age of 55. No single parents, same-sex couples, or common-law couples can apply. In addition, adoptive parents cannot be “disabled,” on medication for psychiatric disorders, or suffering from “severe facial deformities.” These new requirements have caused many Canadians seeking to adopt a child internationally to turn to other countries.

African Countries

Ethiopia is a popular choice for Canadians who want to adopt not one, but two, orphan siblings whose parents may have died from hunger or diseases such as AIDS. Unlike some countries offering international adoption, Ethiopia is considered to have a well-run system of orphanages and keeps a tight reign on corrupt practices such as bribery and extortion. Brent and Laura Livingstone of West Kelowna, British Columbia, are the adoptive parents of Mekfira and Kalkidan—two cousins who were raised as siblings in Ethiopia. The girls spent most of their young lives in orphanages after losing their birth parents.

The Livingstones could have children of their own, but preferred to adopt a pair of siblings from a poor country as a way of helping those less fortunate

than themselves to have a better life. According to Sandra Scarth, president of the Adoption Council of Canada, older orphans such as Mekfira and Kalkidan are placed in orphanages because their communities are simply unable to feed them. Because they are in less demand than infants, they are also less likely to be victims of child trafficking, but end up spending most of their childhood years in orphanages. Scarth believes that people such as the Livingstones, with adequate financial and emotional resources, are engaging in one of the most ethical forms of international adoption by adopting otherwise unwanted children.

The Challenges of Adoption

But for every happy story like that of the Livingstones, there are other cases with far less positive outcomes. One of these is the tragic example of Peggy Hilt, a Virginia woman who adopted an infant named Nina from Russia. Hilt became so worn down by her daughter Nina's inappropriate outbursts, that one day she actually beat her to death. She was sentenced to 19 years in jail.

Although Hilt's case is fortunately rare, there are a disturbing number of examples where the fit between adoptive parents and their children is not successful. Young children from Russia and Eastern Europe in particular seem to be the most problematic, often exhibiting signs of aggression, trauma, and other negative behaviours. Many of these children had abusive or alcoholic parents and had spent many years in poorly run and underfunded orphanages before being adopted. Since the collapse of communism and the

resulting social and economic upheaval in these countries, a growing number of children have been abandoned, and the authorities are more than happy to unload them on eager North American adoptive parents, often pocketing substantial fees for service in return.

International adoption will likely remain a popular method of adding a new member to Canadian families, especially as it has been popularized in the mass media with examples of celebrity adoptions by stars such as Madonna, Angelina Jolie, and others. In some places, particularly Quebec City, where visible minorities are extremely rare, adopting young girls from China has even become trendy. However, this approach to acquiring a new family is fraught with potential challenges and is probably not for everyone. Despite the regulations imposed by the Hague Convention, there are concerns that child trafficking, corrupt practices by orphanages in host countries, and a lack of transparency on the part of some agencies involved in arranging international adoptions may be a growing problem in need of even stronger international controls.

Sources: "International adoption," Citizenship and Immigration Canada, www.cic.gc.ca/english/immigrate/adoption/index.asp; "China stiffens adoption criteria," by Maria Jiminez, *The Globe and Mail*, December 20, 2006; "Instant family," by Adriana Barton, *The Globe and Mail*, March 17, 2009; "When adoption goes wrong," by Pat Wingert with Anna Nemtsova, *Newsweek*, December 17, 2007; and "'White bread' city is home to most foreign adoptions," by Les Perreux, *The Globe and Mail*, July 3, 2007

Activities

1. Why has international adoption become so popular among a growing number of Canadians wanting to bring a new child into their families?
2. From the information presented above, what do you think are advantages and drawbacks of international adoption? Would you recommend this method of finding a new child to someone interested in doing so? Why or why not?

ADOPTION: LOOKING FOR A BABY ABROAD

Changing Demographics, Changing Families

Did you know . . .

In the 1950s, women's wages were thought of as small amounts of money for incidental expenses. The expression "pin money" originally signified money given by a husband to his wife for small personal expenditures such as pins, which were very costly items in centuries past.

Canadian society and Canadian families have changed drastically in the last 50 years. Post-war life in the 1950s was characterized by a return to the "traditional" family, with the man working for wages outside the home, and the woman working in unpaid labour within the home and raising the couple's children. Some women were happy with this arrangement, but others felt stifled because they weren't able to earn their own money and were largely dependent on their husbands.

But that isn't the case today. Almost 50 per cent of marriages end in divorce. Women's work does not provide a second income for the intact family—it often provides the only income for the woman and her children. Women have always worked, but over the past 50 years, more and more women have become the primary breadwinners within their families.

Delaying Motherhood

As women become more educated and successful in their careers, an increasing number put off the decision of when, or even if, they should have children. Women who are establishing their careers often do not want to take time out from those careers to have children.

In addition, some women want to become mothers without necessarily having a permanent relationship with a male partner. And an increasing number of gay and lesbian couples are also exploring the possibilities of parenthood. As a result, some women plan to give birth in their 40s, when in previous decades most pregnancies occurred with women in their 20s. Advances in medical science, in particular in vitro fertilization (IVF)—a process whereby a woman can become pregnant by having either her own or a

donor ovum artificially inseminated—has enabled some women to have children well into their 30s and 40s.

Sylvia Braithwaite, 46, is one example of a Canadian woman who wants to have a child relatively late in her reproductive life. She spent two years undergoing fertility treatments and searching for a donor egg in Argentina. She and her husband, Michael, had tried to conceive a child on their own but without success. They paid \$10 000 to an agency offering to find them an egg from a paid donor, which would be implanted into Sylvia Braithwaite's womb. The egg would then be inseminated by donor sperm. But after doctors told her the chances of the procedure working were very small and advised her to give up on the treatment, the Braithwaites found that the agency was unwilling to refund the total amount of the fee it had charged them, pocketing a \$4 000 deposit for "administrative expenses." One year later, they had only been able to recover \$1 000 of their money.

Unfortunately for many women seeking to become pregnant through IVF, the quality of their ova begins to deteriorate quickly after the age of 35, making it more necessary to rely on a donor egg. Under Canadian law, the only kind of donor egg permitted is one coming from a friend or someone willing to donate it free of charge to a woman seeking IVF treatments. The only other alternative is the one the Braithwaites investigated: using a foreign agency to find a donor egg in another country, often charging a very high fee for the service.

Age Limits on Reproductive Technologies

Procedures such as IVF, especially with the use of donor eggs, have raised a

Did you know . . .

Celebrities Madonna, Halle Berry, and Nicole Kidman all had babies after the age of 40. British actress Jane Seymour gave birth to twin boys at the age of 44, but she recommends that other mothers have their babies while they are young and healthy and preferably by natural means.

major controversy in the field of medical ethics over whether there should be a “best-before-date” for becoming a mother. In rare cases, women implanted with donor eggs have been able to have babies in their 50s and even 60s. In 2009, a panel of medical experts in Ontario recommended that the provincial health-care plan cover the cost of IVF treatments to anyone unable to conceive on their own, including single parents and same-sex couples. But it also stated that the cut-off age for women seeking coverage should be 42. This is because the rate of success for IVF treatments in women over that age is very small. However, women over 42 would still be able to receive the treatments, provided they paid for them on their own.

According to Margaret Somerville, the director of the McGill University Centre for Medical Ethics and Law, and an internationally respected authority in the field, setting age limits on parenthood for women is reasonable. She opposes the view of some medical ethicists and feminists who argue for a woman’s “absolute right to reproductive freedom” by becoming pregnant at any time and by any means she wishes. Noting that the success rate of pregnancies among women over 42 is only 40 per cent at best, Somerville believes that setting age limits “is discrimination in a certain sense, but the only way to handle it ethically and fairly is to put the child first. Everyone else’s claims are secondary” (*The Globe and Mail*, September 1, 2009).

Many women over 40 who investigate the possibility of conceiving a child through IVF are stunned and disappointed to find out how slim their chances of success may be. Jan Silverman, a Toronto fertility counselor, thinks that this misconception may be the result of widespread media coverage of celebrities becoming pregnant after that age. According to Silverman, it is very likely that these famous mothers have relied on donor eggs, which they have the financial resources to purchase, but are reluctant to disclose publicly. As she notes, “we’re misled by media stars who are probably using donor eggs. Women read about someone having twins at 45 and think, ‘Hey, I’m in good shape, I go to the gym. I should be able to do that too’” (*The Globe and Mail*, September 1, 2009).

Since IVF was developed in the 1970s, birth rates in Canada for women over 40 have tripled, but there is no guarantee of success. In addition, even if the procedure does result in a conception, older pregnant women face a higher risk of placental insufficiency. This means that the woman’s placenta may not be able to nourish the fetus in its mother’s womb, and the baby may have a low birth weight or be born before it has grown sufficiently. Because IVF requires that many ova be fertilized in order to maximize the odds of a successful result, multiple births are far more common than they are with normal conceptions.

Source: “When the biological clock runs out,” by Jennifer MacMillan, *The Globe and Mail*, September 1, 2009

Activities

1. Do you think it makes sense that more women in Canada are postponing having children until their 40s?
2. Do you think that provincial health-care plans should fund IVF treatments to women over 40 who want to become pregnant? Why or why not?
3. Do you agree that every woman should be entitled to “absolute reproductive freedom?” Why or why not?

ADOPTION: LOOKING FOR A BABY ABROAD

Celebrity Adoptions

Did you know . . .

Canadian singer Celine Dion, 41, is pregnant with her second child after undergoing fertility treatments. Her first son was born through IVF in 2001, and she has another frozen embryo on hold in case she decides to have a third child.

Pop singer Madonna and actress Angelina Jolie are two celebrities who are almost as well known for their international adoptions as they are for their success in the entertainment business. Jolie and her husband Brad Pitt made headlines by adopting children in a number of countries, including Cambodia, Vietnam, and Ethiopia, as well as giving birth to their own baby in Namibia. In recognition for her efforts to draw attention to the plight of children in poor countries, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) appointed Jolie as a goodwill ambassador for the agency in 2001.

For her part, Madonna's financial support for orphanages in the impoverished and AIDS-ravaged country of Malawi through her charitable foundation Raising Malawi has given her practically carte blanche to adopt children there without following the usual rules and regulations. Malawi requires a potential adoptive parent to reside in the country for at least 18 months, but in early 2009 its highest court ruled that this stipulation could be waived in Madonna's case. This was because her financial contributions to the charity she sponsors there were enough to grant her the status of "resident," even though she did not technically live there and had no intention of doing so.

This ruling, which was denounced by local human rights groups, paved the way for the pop star to adopt Chifundo "Mercy" James, a three-year-old boy who is legally considered an orphan because his mother is dead. However, his biological father, James Kabewa, is still alive in Malawi and wished to retain custody of his child. But because Kabewa was financially unable to care

for his son, in all likelihood Chifundo would have had to remain in an orphanage if Madonna had not been able to adopt him. According to Kabewa, "no one wants to listen to me. I have protested this all along. I want my child back, but I don't know what to do now" (*The Globe and Mail*, June 13, 2009).

In 2006 Madonna adopted her first child from Malawi, a then-13-month-old boy named David Banda. After a lower court rejected her bid to adopt Chifundo in April 2009, she appealed to the highest court in the land to win a verdict in her favour. To Undule Mwakasungura, chairman of Malawi's Human Rights Consultative Committee, the court's ruling means that "anyone can come here tomorrow and give money to an orphanage and then say that they want two or three children from that orphanage. As long as you're supporting some projects in Malawi, even if you're not a resident, you'll be entitled to any child that you want. As long as you have money, you can bypass the rules, and that's what Madonna has done" (*The Globe and Mail*, June 13, 2009).

Cases such as this have resulted in Africa becoming a much more popular source for international adoptions in Canada and elsewhere. Roberta Galbraith is the executive director of the Canadian Advocate for the Adoption of Children, a Manitoba-based international adoption agency that assisted Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt in adopting their daughter, Zahara, in Ethiopia in 2005. She notes that, "there's a celebrity factor associated with Africa, and I don't think that's necessarily good. Before Angelina Jolie and Madonna, did anyone even think of these countries? Some people even have the mentality of going in to 'rescue'

children. We have to be really careful of that. You have to think of the child" (*The Globe and Mail*, June 13, 2009).

The statistics for orphans in Malawi are truly horrific. Since HIV/AIDS began to decimate the country's population in the 1990s, over half a million children have lost at least one of their parents. However many Malawians feel that even though their country is poor and grappling with the AIDS epidemic, this does not justify the wholesale removal of young children by wealthy North Americans with the means to adopt them internationally. They argue that their children's needs would be better served by increasing funding for orphanages in Malawi, where they can be well looked after and remain part of their own country, culture, and language. Madonna replies that her foundation is doing just that, but also reserves for herself the right to adopt at least two children from Malawi.

Madonna's legal case was helped by a precedent involving a Canadian couple, Jane and Carlo Clementino of Burlington, Ontario, who won the right to adopt a little girl they called Idah after a four-year court battle that eventually cost them \$35 000. Idah, whose birth name was Effina Chulu, had lost her mother to AIDS and was being brought up in a Malawi orphanage called the Home of Hope before the Clementinos succeeded in adopting her. She is now a happy, healthy 11-year-old Grade 5 student and cross-country running champion in Burlington. Says Jane Clementino, who has three other children besides Idah "we're not trying to remove her from her culture, but to give her an opportunity. We're doing it for the good of the child. If you can make a difference, why wouldn't you?" (*The Globe and Mail*, June 22, 2009).

In a 2008 article in the prestigious American current affairs journal *Foreign*

Policy titled "The lie we love," E.J. Graff, a senior researcher at Brandeis University's Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism, takes issue with the view that "poor countries have babies in need of homes, and rich countries have homes in need of babies." Although he understands the well-meaning motives of celebrities like Madonna and lesser-known individuals such as the Clementinos in seeking to adopt poor children from Africa, he argues that the idea that the world faces an "orphan crisis" is a myth. This myth, in his view, has led to a situation where babies in many poor countries are being "systematically bought, coerced, and even stolen away from their birth families" who do not want to lose them. Corrupt international adoption agencies and equally disreputable orphanage managers in a number of countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Eastern Europe have colluded to take advantage of North American and Western European people with the funds to pursue the expensive and time-consuming alternative of international adoption for their own benefit.

Graff views this trend as part of the wider process of globalization that has resulted in the "outsourcing" of industries and jobs from rich countries to poor ones, where labour and environmental standards are less stringent. He notes that, "just as companies outsource industry to countries with lax labour laws and low wages, adoptions have moved to states with few laws about the process. . . . In reality, there are very few young, healthy orphans available for adoption around the world. Orphans are rarely healthy babies; healthy babies are rarely orphaned." In support of his viewpoint he cites Nigel Cantwell, a Geneva-based consultant on child protection policy who has helped reform corrupt

international adoption systems in countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, particularly Kazakhstan, one of the more notorious cases. Cantwell claims that healthy children under the age of three could easily find adoptive homes in their own countries were it not for the attractions of big money offered by international adoption. He believes that if no cash changed hands as a result of

this process, the number of babies in these regions available for international adoption would drop to zero.

Source: "Madonna's material world opens doors to adoption," by Geoffrey York, *The Globe and Mail*, June 13, 2009; "Before Madonna, there was Idah," by Geoffrey York, *The Globe and Mail*, June 22, 2009; and "The lie we love," by E.J. Graff, *Foreign Policy*, November-December 2008.

Activities

1. Do you think that the idea of adopting poor children from countries like Malawi and Ethiopia would be so attractive to prospective parents in Canada if celebrities such as Madonna and Angelina Jolie had not done so? Why or why not?
2. Critics argue that Madonna's two adoptive children would have been better off remaining in their own country if they were well cared for. Do you agree with this criticism? Why or why not?
3. Do you agree with the claim of E.J. Graff that the global "orphan crisis" is a myth and that the rise in international adoptions is encouraging corrupt and illegal practices in many countries? Why or why not?

ADOPTION: LOOKING FOR A BABY ABROAD

Activity: Setting Rules for Adoption Agencies

In the fall of 2009, the government of Ontario moved to tighten controls over international adoption agencies in the province, in particular by monitoring their financial operations. This decision was the direct result of the bankruptcy of a supposedly non-profit agency operating under the name of Imagine Adoption the previous July. This bankruptcy had placed the hopes of more than 400 families who were planning to adopt children from other countries in jeopardy and led to allegations of gross financial improprieties on the part of its two chief executive officers, Rick and Susan Hayhow.

Waterloo Regional Police began to conduct a fraud investigation after allegations that the Hayhows, now estranged, had charged over \$300 000 to agency credit cards for home renovations, expensive vehicles, travel, and even a horse and saddle. On declaring bankruptcy, Imagine Adoption had \$500 000 in the bank, while clients waiting to adopt children were claiming refunds of up to \$3-million. In response to this situation, the families affected by Imagine Adoption's bankruptcy have joined together to help refinance the agency with new management and a new board of directors. Meanwhile, new provincial regulations will require international adoption agencies to provide audited financial statements, public annual reports, and operational outlines before the Ministry of Children and Youth Services will issue them a licence to conduct business in Ontario.

Source: "Province to tighten watch over adoption agencies," by Brian Caldwell, *The Record*, October 1, 2009.

Your Task

Form small groups. Based on what you have learned from this video and resource guide story about international adoption and the agencies that specialize in it, develop rules and guidelines that you think governments in Canada and other countries should use to regulate the activities of these agencies. As part of your discussions, you may wish to take the following topics into account:

- The Hague Convention
- The case of Lindsay Drummond in Kazakhstan
- Celebrity adoptions in Africa (Madonna, Angelina Jolie, etc.)
- The views of E.J. Graff
- The bankruptcy of Imagine Adoption

When your group has finished its discussion, present your suggested rules and guidelines to the class as a whole. When all the groups have presented, hold an in-class discussion of the issue of international adoption, the risks of abuse that it may entail, and how countries such as Canada can work on the international stage to ensure that it works for the benefit of both adoptive children from poor countries and individuals, couples, and families here in Canada.