

bill that protects and provides hope to survivors of torture.

I join my colleagues in acknowledging the outstanding work of the center for Victims of torture (CVT) located in my home state of Minnesota. I had the honor of participating in a special event in Minnesota earlier this summer in celebration of the second United Nations International Day in Support of torture Victims by planting a tree that symbolizes the growth and healing that the CVT hopes to bring to survivors of torture. I commend the hard work and efforts of the CVT for treating these broken persons and injured spirits; trying to take away the living nightmares of these victims. They refer to this as "rising from the ashes," in terms of these broken spirits and broken bodies that are delivered to our shores and communities.

We must surely embrace these persons and give them protection from religious and political persecution. We must be cognizant of the fact that they are going to need more than just refuge in this country. They need a helping hand.

According to the CVT, it is estimated that as many as 400,000 victims of torture now reside in the United States, with an estimated 12,000 to 15,000 residing in Minnesota. The Center's clients have come from around the world—52 percent from Africa, 25 percent from South and Southeast Asia, 11 percent from Latin America, six percent from the Middle East and three percent from Eastern Europe. An estimated two-thirds of CVT clients are seeking asylum from persecution at the time they first contact the Center.

Many torture survivors suffer from severe psychological effects such as fear, guilt, nightmares, flashbacks, anxiety and depression. The debilitating nature of torture makes it extremely difficult for survivors to hold steady jobs, study for new professions and careers, or acquire other skills needed for a successful integration into our nation's culture and economy. Congress should provide hope for these talented, educated and productive people who were purposefully disabled by their own governments.

In response to this human suffering, I was a cosponsor of the Torture Victims Relief Act that was enacted into law last Congress, and I continue to strongly support this legislation in the 106th Congress. This Reauthorization builds upon last year's success and provides an important first step in healing the wounds of government-inflicted torture on individuals, their families and their communities. Specifically, this bill authorizes \$10 million for the next three years for grants to centers and programs that treat victims of torture in foreign countries and centers and programs in the United States that aid victims of torture. Such funds will cover the costs of supporting torture victims, including rehabilitation, social and legal services and research and training for health care providers. Furthermore, this legislation funds \$5 million per year for the U.S. contribution to the UN Voluntary Fund to find new and innovative ways to support torture victims treatment programs and encourage the development of such programs. Finally, this bill provides training for foreign service officers to help them identify torture and its effects upon innocent civilians.

Torture is a crime against humanity. It is the single most effective weapon against democracy. As members of Congress, it is our responsibility to protect and shield the world

from this strategic tool of repression. I urge all members to support this much needed Reauthorization which will respond to the evils of torture and its physical, social, emotional and spiritual consequences upon our communities.

INTRODUCTION OF THE INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION ACT OF 1999,
H.R. 2909

HON. BENJAMIN A. GILMAN

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, September 22, 1999

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce today the "Intercountry Adoption Act of 1999" along with 36 of my colleagues. This is an important consumer measure that will protect American adoptive parents and the children from other nations they want to adopt.

This bipartisan bill provides the Executive Branch with the necessary authorities to implement the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption.

The Hague Convention was developed in response to abuses in the intercountry adoption process, including illegal child trafficking. The Hague Convention sets forth standards and procedures that can be recognized and followed by countries involved with intercountry 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 internationally 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. It 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.

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 bribed 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.

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.

HAGUE INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION ACT

HON. TOM BILEY

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, September 22, 1999

Mr. BILEY. 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 to address only the issues necessary to implement the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption. The future success of this bill dictates that we fulfill our obligations under the Hague Convention and leave all other matters for another time.

As an adoptive father, adoption is very close to my heart. My profound commitment to helping vulnerable children has been shown in legislation I have sponsored to promote adoption over the years. I am committed to helping children without parents in the U.S. and around the world join a loving home. The Hague Intercountry Adoption Act builds upon a foundation established by adoptive families in America. The willingness of many families to travel across the world to adopt orphaned children shows the true spirit of America.

Thousands of children worldwide are waiting helplessly for parents to read to them, to teach them how to tie shoe laces, to say bedtime prayers with them, and to eat ice-cream with them on a summer night. It is in the best interest for a child to be part of a loving family. Only as a last resort should intercountry adoption be a option. However, after all steps to place a child for adoption in their birth country are exhausted, intercountry adoption must be a viable and safe option for the children and adoptive parents. It takes a great deal of faith for one country to allow their children to be adopted by people from another country. As a result, officials in other countries are looking for accountability at a federal level to ensure the safety and rights of their children.

In the last year, I have met with several Members of the Russian Duma and the Director General of China Center on Adoption Affairs. I informed both delegations that the U.S. Congress places significant emphasis on the future of intercountry adoption. The Hague Intercountry Act specifically addresses the issue of a central authority in the U.S. State Department for other countries to contact in case there is a problem with an intercountry adoption.

Adoptive parents will benefit by an accreditation system required by all agencies who provide intercountry adoption services. A strong accreditation process will help prevent some people from taking advantage of vulnerable parents in the process of building a family through adoption. Adoptive parents in America deserve to know that their adoption agency has passed a vigorous and thorough accreditation standard.

Adoptive parents and government officials demand to know unethical behavior will not be

tolerated. The Hague Intercountry Adoption Act provides for civil money penalties up to \$25,000 for a first violation and up to \$50,000 for each subsequent violation by unscrupulous individuals and agencies.

In order to ensure ethical behavior for all involved, the above-mentioned civil penalties apply to any individual who provides adoption services in the United States in connection with Convention adoptions without proper accreditation or approval. Additionally, if one provide false statements, improperly induces consent from a birth mother to relinquish her parental rights or violates the privacy provisions contained in Section 401, they will also be subject to fines of up to \$25,000 and \$50,000. Criminal penalties in the same amounts will also apply for violations. The strong enforcement provisions included in the Hague Intercountry Adoption Act are a necessary tool to ensure penalties go far beyond the cost of merely doing business.

Rarely does Congress have an opportunity to improve the lives of children and families. The Hague Intercountry Adoption Act gives the U.S. Congress an opportunity to stand-up and reaffirm our support for intercountry adoption.

INTRODUCTION OF THE INTER- COUNTRY ADOPTION ACT OF 1999

HON. WILLIAM D. DELAHUNT

OF MASSACHUSETTS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, September 22, 1999

Mr. DELAHUNT. Mr. Speaker, I am proud to join with Chairman GILMAN and over 30 of our colleagues in introducing the Intercountry Adoption Act of 1999.

This bipartisan legislation will 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.

Prompt U.S. ratification and implementation of the Hague Convention is of enormous importance to many thousands of needy children throughout the world and the American families who adopt them. The Convention establishes a legal framework for protecting these children and families by ensuring that agencies and individuals involved in the intercountry adoption process meet standards of competence, financial soundness, and ethical behavior. It creates a structure to strengthen international cooperation in adoption cases, and to ease the burdens of what can be an expensive, time-consuming and stressful process.

As the adoptive parent of a child born overseas, I know what the Convention will mean to countless families like mine.

The Intercountry Adoption Act provides a blueprint that will enable the United States to carry out its obligations under the Convention, ensuring reciprocal recognition of adoptions by the United States and other Convention countries, eliminating much current paperwork connected with the legalization of documents, and creating legally enforceable safeguards for adoptive children and their families.

The bill designates the Department of State as the "central authority" for the United States, with responsibility for liaison with the