

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

central authorities of other Convention countries and the coordination of Convention activities by persons subject to U.S. jurisdiction.

The bill also assigns certain key functions to various domestic agencies, to be carried out in consultation with the Secretary of State. The Secretary of Health and Human Services is given responsibility for overseeing the accreditation and approval of organizations and individuals providing adoption services in the United States in connection with Convention adoptions. To the Attorney General are given various duties related to immigration, record keeping and privacy requirements.

This legislation is the culmination of many months of hard work, and is the result of extensive consultation with many parties, including the administration and the U.S. adoption community.

We have taken a "minimalist" approach to our task, deferring, wherever possible, to the state laws by which we have always regulated adoption in this country, and resisting attempts to use the bill as a vehicle for carrying out changes to domestic adoption practices at the federal level that are not required to bring our laws into compliance with the Convention.

Our goal throughout this process has been to put adoptive children first, through the prompt ratification and implementation of the Convention. We have done our utmost to steer clear of extraneous issues that might delay or derail that objective.

The International Relations Committee and the Committee on Ways and Means will shortly begin consideration of this legislation, and it is my sincere hope that the bill will move forward expeditiously in the same spirit of cooperation that has enabled us to reach this milestone.

AMERICA'S SENIORS DESERVE FAIRNESS

HON. ROBERT A. UNDERWOOD

OF GUAM

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, September 22, 1999

Mr. UNDERWOOD. Mr. Speaker, it is no secret that drug manufacturers all across the nation have and continue to engage in the unfortunate practice of price discrimination. On the brunt end of this discrimination is our senior citizens, a constituency who by no means deserves this ill and insensitive treatment. Today, seniors who purchase their own prescription drugs are forced to pay twice as much for their drugs as the federal government and Health Maintenance Organizations (HMOs). This financial burden must be eliminated and this discrimination must come to an end. Fairness for our seniors can prevail by Congress addressing this situation now.

Price discrimination on the part of drug manufacturers in this country has brought devastating effects on older Americans. Acting on their vulnerability, drug manufacturers have taken advantage of older Americans while giving breaks to their most favored customers: the federal government and HMOs. The exorbitant cost of prescription drugs forces seniors to choose between buying food to feed themselves, paying the electric bill to warm their home in the brutal winter, and paying for the medications they so desperately need to stay healthy and well. It is not fair to put seniors,

who have limited and fixed incomes, in a situation of having to choose between life's necessities. Allowing this discrimination and unfairness to continue is simply wrong and only exacerbates this situation.

Mr. Speaker, there is a solution to this problem. Legislation crafted by my colleagues, TOM ALLEN, JIM TURNER, and MARION BERRY, will reduce prescription drug prices for older Americans by over 40 percent without any significant cost to the federal government. I am a proud co-sponsor of this important legislation, H.R. 664, the Prescription Drug Fairness for Seniors Act, which relies on market forces to lower the costs of prescription drugs for seniors. The bill would allow pharmacists to purchase drugs for senior citizens at the same price the federal government purchases prescription drugs through the Department of Veterans Affairs, Medicaid, or other programs. My constituents, especially the seniors on Guam know all too well the dilemma of acquiring needed medication without sacrificing the other essential necessities of life, strongly support this legislation and have called upon me to urge my colleagues to do the same.

Mr. Speaker, I want to particularly thank my colleague, Congressman TOM ALLEN, for his diligent work in bringing this issue to our attention, of his work in sponsoring this legislation and for his unwavering commitment to older Americans. Mr. Speaker, I sincerely hope that the Prescription Drug Fairness for Seniors Act receives its due consideration and reaches the floor for passage as soon as possible. Our senior citizens deserve no less than affordable medication and a Congress that cares.

DEVASTATING EARTHQUAKE HITS TAIWAN

HON. WILLIAM O. LIPINSKI

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, September 22, 1999

Mr. LIPINSKI. Mr. Speaker, a devastating earthquake struck Taiwan earlier this week. The quake was centered 90 miles south of Taipei in Nantou county. Registering 7.6 on the Richter scale, the quake has claimed more than 1,800 lives and destroyed hundreds of homes. Thousands more are believed to be trapped in the rubble, and the death toll is expected to increase. Aftershocks continue to rumble through Taiwan.

The earthquake crippled Taiwan's infrastructure in the hardest hit areas. Phone, power and water lines were knocked out. Over 100,000 people were left homeless sleeping on blankets in makeshift shelter areas. Roads are barely usable as large gashes crisscross many of the main thoroughfares in central Taiwan making it extremely difficult for rescue workers to deliver aid.

I understand that a number of Americans may have family or friends in Taiwan. Many of them may be extremely worried due to the lack of information and the inability to contact them by phone. I call upon the U.S. Department of State and the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office. Taiwan's de facto embassy in the U.S., to coordinate efforts to keep them informed of further developments and to provide all reasonable assistance in locating and determining the status of their family and friends.

The U.S. Agency for International Development, the lead U.S. agency for international humanitarian efforts, has activated a team of 100 search and rescue personnel and 106,000 pounds of equipment. They have also provided a general information number that can be reached at 1-800-USAID-RELIEF. I commend USAID for their swift and efficient response to this humanitarian disaster, and I am certain that they will continue to work closely with Taiwan to coordinate relief efforts.

USAID has indicated the transportation of relief goods to Taiwan is very difficult and inefficient at this time, so monetary donations are preferred. To that end, the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office established the "Taiwan Earthquake Relief Fund" for individuals interested in providing support. Donations can be made to Riggs Bank, account number 17306006, 1913 Massachusetts Avenue, NW., Washington, DC, 20016.

The U.S. is not the sole nation involved in the search and rescue effort. The response from the international community has also been swift. Switzerland, Germany, Singapore, Japan and Russia have all sent personnel and equipment to Taiwan to assist with search and rescue efforts.

All the rescue teams are working non-stop to comb through the rubble in search of survivors. God bless them for their tireless and courageous efforts.

My thoughts and prayers are with them all in the aftermath of this tragic disaster.

U.S. CONGRESSIONAL LETTER CALLS FOR RELEASE OF POLITICAL PRISONERS IN INDIA

HON. JOHN T. DOOLITTLE

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, September 22, 1999

Mr. DOOLITTLE. Mr. Speaker, last month several of my colleagues and I sent a letter to Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee calling for the release of political prisoners in India. So far we have received no response.

According to Amnesty International, thousands of political prisoners are being held in illegal detention without charge or trial. Several Sikh political prisoners wrote a letter from the Nabha Security jail on the Sikh Nation's 300th anniversary in which they urged Sikhs to get involved in getting them released. Some of these Sikh political prisoners have been held since 1984. Fifteen years in illegal detention without charge or trials is the tactic of a police state, not of the democracy India claims to be.

Our letter reminds the Indian leader that if India is going to proclaim its democratic principles, it should release all political prisoners and bring the police who have committed atrocities against the Sikhs to justice. If it does not, we should be ready to take appropriate action to deprive India of the privileges that accrue to democratic and friendly countries.

If India continues to oppress its minorities and hold thousands of political prisoners without charge of trial, America should stop aid and trade to the repressive Indian regime. In addition, we should support self-determination for all the nations and peoples of South Asia. This is the way to ensure that all the people and nations of South Asia may live in freedom.