

ICAV Speech to the UN on 20 September 2023

Hi everyone my name is Lynelle Long and I'm a Vietnamese adoptee raised in Australia. I'm also the founder of InterCountry Adoptee Voices (ICAV) and I'm presenting to you from Sydney.

Firstly, I wish to thank the UN Committees and Special Rapporteurs for inviting ICAV here today and for their hard work and commitment to supporting us.

Special thanks to the Committee on Enforced Disappearances for making this possible and coordinating us all! I am honoured to be here with my fellow colleagues!

Having published the UN Joint Statement a year ago, it was and remains a beacon of light after so many years of our voices crying out in what often felt like the darkness. Perhaps because of our great resilience and courage from being sent abroad completely alone as adoptees into a foreign country as infants and young children, we have developed the tenacity and will power to be able to stand here today to fight for our rights and call out the wrongs done to so many of us.

Our global community is large and ICAV is here to represent a portion of that. I would love for all of them to present to you themselves, but for the purposes of today's meeting and due to the time constraints, ICAV has compiled a collaborative paper that gives you their input and perspectives, other than from only the speakers today. I know from providing peer support to this community for 25 years, that our experiences vary and it's important to understand the nuances when trying to achieve real and impactful change.

We come to you presenting our ICAV paper, representing **9 adoptive countries and 19 birth countries**.

Our paper has been provided as a link to the CED Secretariat but is also hosted at ICAV's website <https://intercountryadopteevoices.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Victims-of-Illegal-Inter-country-Adoption-Speak-Out-to-the-UN.pdf>

I'm going to speak about what we see as the top 4 priorities as shown in our global collaborative, and I provide my suggestion as to WHO should be involved and responsible to address each priority:

Priority 1

We need legislative frameworks to define illegal intercountry adoptions and allow the prosecution of those who do wrong. We need to criminalise the behaviours and we need to remove barriers such as the statutes of limitations and ensure compensation to victims aligned to the lifelong impacts.

Who responsible: Legislative frameworks need to be tackled by politicians and lawyers around the world and ultimately it is the public - the people - who push legislators and governments to do the will of the people.

The UN could also further assist by developing an in-depth legal definition for what an illegal and illicit intercountry adoption is, providing examples.

The UN is already addressing the huge need to educate people by holding this forum today. Papers like ICAV's and the many other adoptee led papers and resources that contribute significantly to this topic are important. We all do what we can to educate the world.

Priority 2

Truth investigations that lead to public acknowledgement, an accounting for what has gone wrong, and having full, un-redacted access to our history and origins artefacts.

Who responsible: States / governments around the world need to fund an independent body to conduct Truth Investigations so that the evidence is brought to light and then the States need to

give public acknowledgements and funding to remedy the wrongs of the past.

Priority 3

The need for legislated and free post adoption supports that include illegal and illicit intercountry adoption specialist supports, esp DNA testing, genealogy, and search/reunification services. Not all countries currently offer post adoption supports. This needs to change.

Who responsible: legislators to bring about the legislation part, but then States need to fund and ensure provision of trauma informed and professional services.

Priority 4

Stop and end all intercountry adoptions as they are conducted today (Hague and non Hague) and until priority 1, 2 and 3 are addressed. We should not be continuing what has become the commodification and trade of children.

Who responsible: States / governments, The Hague, need to step up and end this ongoing trade of children, take responsibility for their own and turn to local solutions in-country.

Intercountry adoption in this manner and via the current processes since the past 70 years are not in the best interests of the child.

To end, I want to bring attention to the voices of biological families who you have started to hear from today. I am thankful and honoured to have worked with the CED to enable this as our first event where adoptees and biological families can present our experiences and views, side by side.

Illegal and illicit intercountry adoptions have lifelong and multi generational impacts and as adoptees being raised in mostly white western countries we have so much privilege, so much access to basic resources like internet and DNA technology.

I am strongly of the view, and I lead from example, that we must do more to help bring our biological families with us so their voices can also be heard.

Thank you and I look forward to listening to the rest of our presenters and working with the UN Committees into the future.