



LICADHO

CAMBODIAN LEAGUE FOR THE PROMOTION
AND DEFENSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

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August 5, 2004

Media statement

Full investigation needed into adoption corruption & abuses

LICADHO urges the government to fully investigate alleged crimes – including payments of thousands of dollars to Cambodian government employees – connected to the adoptions of Cambodian children to the United States.

According to a US court document, American adoption facilitator Lauryn Galindo and her accomplices were responsible for payments of up to \$3500 to “Cambodian ministry clerks, employees or officials” for each adoption which she facilitated. The document also refers to a “Cambodian public official” who received money directly from American adoptive parents into his Phnom Penh bank account.

“There is every reason to believe that these payments were bribes, given the fact that the government has stated that it does not charge adoption fees,” said Kek Galabru, LICADHO’s president. “Cambodian authorities must conduct a proper investigation and anyone guilty of corruption must be prosecuted.”

Lauryn Galindo and her sister Lynn Devin, director of Seattle International Adoptions agency, have pleaded guilty to criminal charges in the US including conspiracy to commit visa fraud and conspiracy to launder money. They have not yet been sentenced by the court.

The charges relate to the adoptions of Cambodian children by American families based on false information given to US authorities to obtain visas for the children. Galindo, Devin and their accomplices gave “false identities” to the children, and falsely claimed that they were abandoned orphans with no known living parents.

Galindo and Devin charged adoptive parents between \$10,500 and \$11,500 for each adoption, according to official documents filed in the US District Court in Seattle, Washington. “Approximately \$3500 of these funds were used, in part, to pay Cambodian ministry clerks, employees or officials in order to facilitate the adoption process in Cambodia,” says one document.

The document refers to two unnamed Cambodian accomplices of Galindo’s, one of whom is a “Cambodian public official”, who received money from the fees paid by US adoptive parents.

Galindo, who has arranged hundreds of adoptions of Cambodian children, has pleaded guilty to committing crimes in 17 adoptions to the US between 1997 and 2001. For those 17 adoptions, Galindo and the two Cambodian conspirators, including the public official, received a total of \$93,700 which was sent by adoptive parents in the US to bank accounts in Phnom Penh. In addition, Galindo collected a total of \$59,500 -- \$3500 for each adoption – directly from the adoptive parents when they came to Cambodia to collect the children.

Around September 1997, according to the court document, adoptive parents were instructed by Lynn Devin to send payments of \$2,250 directly into the public official's personal account at the Cambodian Commercial Bank in Phnom Penh.

The court document does not identify the public official or any other civil servant who received money from Galindo and her associates, or any Cambodian government ministry involved. But it states that money was paid to ministry clerk, employees or officials "to prepare supporting documentation" for adoption applications.

According to Cambodian law, the Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Council of Ministers are responsible for processing adoption applications.

Under Cambodian criminal law, the payment of bribes to civil servants is a crime, both for the payer and the receiver, punishable by imprisonment.

"The US prosecution of Lauryn Galindo and Lynn Devin is very good news, but the Cambodian government must also show commitment to fighting corruption and other adoption abuses," said Kek Galabru. "The government should officially request the evidence collected in this case by US authorities, and ensure that Cambodian authorities properly investigate and prosecute accomplices of Galindo and Devin in Cambodia."

As well as corruption, investigations should focus on the Cambodian orphanages used by Galindo and Devin, which include WOVA Cham Chao, WOVA Sihanoukville, Kampong Speu orphanage and Siem Reap orphanage. Investigations should determine whether orphanage staff committed crimes in obtaining children from birth families and preparing false documents for the children.

"In at least some of the adoptions for which Galindo and Devin are being prosecuted, US authorities were told the children were true orphans when in fact they had birth parents still alive," said Galabru. "We need to know who these birth families are, and were they coerced, cheated or paid to give up their children to orphanages?"

Finally, LICADHO urges serious reforms to the Cambodian adoption system to stamp out corruption, fraudulent paperwork and child trafficking. "The prosecutions in the US are proof of the many problems in the Cambodian adoption system – crimes are being committed and it's time that the government took serious action to clean up this mess," said Galabru.

"The problems go far wider than Galindo, Devin and their accomplices," added Galabru. "Hundreds of adoptions have been conducted from Cambodia, and millions of dollars have been paid by foreigners to adopt Cambodian children – who's getting this money, and how much of it has gone to actually improving the lives of poor Cambodian children?"

Lynn Devin is due to be sentenced by the US court in August, and Galindo in September. They face a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison. In addition, they have agreed that their illegal profits will be forfeited to the US Government. Galindo has agreed to forfeit her house in Hawaii, her Jaguar car, and the contents of six bank accounts in the US, Singapore, Hong Kong and Cambodia.

For more information:

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