

UNICEF

**United Nations Children's
Fund**

Committee: United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)

Topic: Measures to end coerced adoptions

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I. Committee Background

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) was established on December 11th, 1946 by the General Assembly (GA). It was created to improve and develop the rights of children around the world. The committee consists of 36 members who are elected every three years by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). UNICEF operates in 192 countries and territories. It does this through its 150 country offices, 34 country-specific committees and 7 regional offices. Its headquarters are based in New York City. The current director of the committee is Henrietta Fore and she began serving her term on January 1st, 2018. UNICEF is credited with the creation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 and the fundraising of millions of dollars in support of health and educational programs for children around the world (Brown, The Guardian, 2015). Moreover, in 1965, the committee was recognized for its efforts with the Nobel Peace Prize (About, UNICEF, 2020). Currently, UNICEF is focused on achieving the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a special focus on Goals 1 to 4 which aim to eliminate poverty and hunger, as well as provide children with quality education (SDGs, UNICEF, 2020).

II. Topic Information

A) History of the Topic

Adoption “is the permanent legal transfer of all parental rights from one

person or couple to another person or couple” (ACO, 2020). Adoptions can happen either between related family members or between unrelated individuals. Children under the age of 18 years are adopted for a variety of reasons. These include the death of their birth parents, abuse, neglect, the search for a better life, etc. (Adoption UK, 2020). While most adoptions are concessional, some are coerced or forced upon the parents and the child. Adoption.com defines coerced adoption as “when there is any type of pressure, withholding of information or services, or purposeful manipulation that results in [the parents] choosing to place [their] child for adoption” (Baker, Adoption.com, 2015).

While coerced adoptions are illegal in many countries, “subtle coercion that falls into a legal gray area” still takes place on a daily basis. Subtly coerced adoptions can take advantage of a person’s situation such as paying the parent’s living expenses, purchasing her expensive gifts or providing them with free housing. It can also include manipulation and gaslighting such as constantly reiterating that they are making the right decision or that past trauma will be healed once the baby has been given to a better home (Baker, Adoption.com, 2015). The perpetrators of coerced adoptions can include anyone in a position of trust, authority, or relative power in relation to the parents. Some examples are adoption counsellors, adoption agency employees, social workers, hospital staff, medical professionals, prospective adopters, family members, etc. According to Origins Canada, coercion is used to “deliberately eliminate informed choice for mothers.” It is not done to benefit the mother or the baby, but because others want to separate them for adoption purposes. Perpetrators of coerced adoptions often benefit from the process by receiving large monetary payments (Origins Canada, 2012).

Coerced adoptions can have many negative effects on the parents (especially the mother) and the child. Negative effects can include “severe unresolved grief, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), relationship and parenting difficulties, self-esteem issues, and physical health complications resulting from stress” (Origins Canada, 2012). The Institute for Family Studies found that children adopted through coercion often experience “both short-term distress reactions and longer-term abnormalities in their feelings and behaviour toward other people.” This is especially more prevalent in children adopted through coercive techniques later in their childhoods since they knew their birth parents and were separated from them (Zill, Institute for Family Studies, 2015).

B) Current Issues

China: According to the Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism, coerced adoptions are common in China. Adoptions by couples in the West can be very lucrative for Chinese adoption agencies. Therefore, these agencies have been known to take advantage of poor families living in rural areas of the country. They sometimes promise families large sums of money for the child or to help the family eliminate a large debt. Feeling like they have no choice, the families sign forms giving the adoption agency the rights to their child. However, the issue is also that most of the time, the parents are illiterate and do not fully understand what they are agreeing to. Many often believe that the adoption is temporary and due to Chinese laws, have very little power in having the agency prosecuted or their child recovered (Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism, 2012).

Turkey: In Turkey, adoption is highly regulated by the government. It is governed mainly by the Civil Code, the Statute on Execution of Interventions Regarding Adoption, and the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption. Moreover, all adoptions must be handled by the General Directorate of Social Services and Protection of Children, not by individual agencies. In order to prevent coerced adoptions, the law states that in-person consent of the biological parents and consent of the child (if he or she has the capacity for consent) are among the requirements of adoption. Finally, the adopted child is kept under the temporary care of their prospective parents for a period of at least one year. During this time, the biological parents can reverse their decision. This is yet another step put in place by the Turkish government to ensure that a coerced adoption does not take place (Library of Congress, 2015).

United Kingdom: In the 1950s, 60s and 70s, around a half a million babies were forced into adoption in the United Kingdom (UK). The majority were born to unmarried women who sought help in “mother and baby homes” run by the Catholic church, Church of England and the Salvation Army. A recent investigation launched by the UK government into these adoptions has found that the vulnerable young women were made to feel guilty or ashamed for having a baby out of wedlock. They were told by counsellors and clergy members that they were unfit to raise their child. Criminal charges have not been filed, however, public apologies have been made to those impacted by the adoptions (Sherwood, The Guardian, 2016). Since the early 1990s, adoption practices have been highly regulated in the UK. Adoptions must be made through certified agencies and specific requirements or protocols must be followed. These were put in place to eliminate coerced adoptions and protect the parents and child (Gov.uk, 2019).

C) UN Action

In March 2017, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) hosted a special session on illegal or coerced adoptions. The session was led by Special Rapporteur Maud de Boer-Buquicchio and featured research studies and victim testimonies. The committee agreed that coerced adoptions must be “prohibited, criminalized and sanctioned as such.” It also made several recommendations for United Nations member states to follow and implement. These included “reviewing national laws to ensure that they do not contribute to the creation or maintenance of an enabling environment for illegal adoptions, strengthening and investing in more effective national child protection systems and establishing mechanisms for addressing the concerns of adoptees, adoptive parents and biological parents” (OHCHR, 2017). Moreover, in 2009, the UN released its only study into worldwide adoption trends. The report highlighted countries of concern in relation to coerced adoptions and actions that can be taken by those nations in order to stop it from continuing (UN, 2009).

III. Essential Questions

1. What is coerced adoption?
2. What are the main reasons behind coerced adoptions?
3. What social, psychological and emotional effects do coerced adoptions have on children?
4. What is the United Nations doing to address this issue?
5. What laws does your country have to prevent coerced adoptions?
6. Which other organizations are working on this issue? Does your delegation work with any of them? If so, which ones?

IV. Quorum

- Afghanistan
- Brazil
- Canada
- China
- France
- India
- Indonesia
- Iran
- Mexico
- Pakistan
- Russia
- Saudi Arabia
- South Africa
- Syria
- Turkey
- United Kingdom
- United States

V. Resources

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