



**ATTORNEY-GENERAL
HON ROBERT McCLELLAND MP**

MEDIA RELEASE

5 March 2010

ETHIOPIAN INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION PROGRAM

Attorney-General, Robert McClelland, today announced that the Ethiopia-Australia intercountry adoption program will resume on 6 April 2010.

The program was temporarily suspended in November 2009 due to concerns that Australia could no longer conduct intercountry adoptions in Ethiopia in a manner consistent with its obligations under the *Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in respect of Intercountry Adoption*.

As part of a formal review of the program, an Australian delegation travelled to Ethiopia in January 2010 to examine concerns relating to a possible link between the referral of children to the program and development assistance funding.

The review recommends the resumption of the program following the implementation of changes to ensure its ongoing integrity and continued compliance with the Hague Convention, including:

- undertaking background checks of children referred to the program;
- establishing exclusive relationships with a limited number of specific orphanages to ensure children referred to the program are legitimately in need of adoption;
- entering into formal, transparent, government regulated agreements to provide development assistance for projects unrelated to intercountry adoption;
- setting a formal, transparent, fixed child maintenance fee that is payable to orphanages for the reasonable costs of caring for a child; and
- negotiating a new memorandum of understanding with the Ethiopian Government and a new Service Agreement with an Australian Representative.

These changes, which have been identified as necessary for the program's continuation, will also require a restructuring of fees to reflect actual costs and the need to provide development assistance.

The continuation of the program's suspension until 6 April 2010 will be necessary to ensure adequate safeguards are put in place.

Adoption cases referred to the program prior to the suspension will continue to be progressed according to usual practice. Other cases will be matched as new children are referred to the program after 6 April 2010.

The Government understands that the suspension of the program has been a difficult period for many Australian families. The review and interim suspension of the program has, however, been critical to ensure that it complies with the Hague Convention and operates in an ethical and responsible manner that protects the best interests of children.

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