

## **The U.N. vs. Adoption**

Don't trust the international bureaucrats to be humanitarians.

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IT'S BEEN SEVERAL MONTHS since I last thought about Benjamin and Elizabeth. It hit me as our older children were headed off to school. Elizabeth would have been in first grade in our local elementary school and Ben would be getting on the bus in September headed to kindergarten.

Had it not been for the United Nations, Benjamin and Elizabeth would have been my children. Now that the United States is considering letting the U.N. run social services in postwar Iraq, perhaps their story should be told.

Benjamin and Elizabeth (our legal names for them had we been successful in adopting them) were orphaned by the fighting in Kosovo. Although American and other allied forces manage the political and security arrangements in Kosovo, the United Nations is responsible for social and humanitarian services. When it comes to child welfare, this means UNICEF.

We have a close friend, a nurse, who was supplying medicine and equipment to the village hospitals and clinics in Kosovo back in 1998. She happened upon Ben and Elizabeth in an orphanage in Pristina, the capital. Most orphaned children in that conflict were adopted by family and other clan members, but there were thousands of such children, and some like Ben and Elizabeth had no close relatives. Others were the product of rapes committed by Serbian soldiers during their brutal occupation of the country, whose parentage made them outcasts and unadoptable.

Our nurse friend approached the doctors in the orphanage and the local town leadership about these children. Given the children's bleak prospects, they were enthusiastic about adoption by an American couple, and helped petition the administrators of the orphanage.

The head of the orphanage, a French national in her late twenties, made her objections quite clear. "As long as I am in charge of this orphanage, no Americans will adopt any of the children here. These children will remain in country." The "in country" she preferred to America for these children was a poor, war-ravaged nation policed by foreign soldiers.

At first we thought this attitude simply reflected the prejudices of yet another of the left-wing European bureaucrats who staff most of the United Nations. So we began calling UNICEF officials in Geneva and New York, and writing letters to any seemingly appropriate official we could find on the U.N. website. As Americans we take for granted the process of accountability known as "petitioning for redress of grievances."

Never mind that ordinary Americans provide the overwhelming majority of non-governmental support for UNICEF. The "power of the purse" does not exist. Nor are basic notions like accountability and the democratic rights of ordinary people part of the

U.N. bureaucracy's worldview. It took eight months and serious behind-the-scenes pressure for us to get our first, and only, response.

As it turns out, the French head of the orphanage was not merely enforcing her own anti-American prejudice. It is the official policy of UNICEF and the United Nations to permit no transnational adoptions wherever the U.N. has jurisdiction. This is the reality of U.N. "humanitarianism."

The ravages of Saddam Hussein and the Iraq war have doubtless left thousands of orphaned Iraqi children. Ideally, family members and other Iraqis able to support these children will take them in. But the realities of a poor, war-torn country mean that many will not find loving homes in Iraq. There are countless families in America and elsewhere who would be thrilled to adopt these orphans. These include Iraqi-American families. But they will not be allowed to if the United Nations has any say in the matter..

Things worked out well for our family. In December 2000 we adopted Thomas Lindsey on his first birthday. He was also a product of the war in Kosovo. But because his mother walked across the border to Macedonia while nine months pregnant, she and baby Thomas escaped the clutches of the U.N. bureaucrats. Thomas is now 3 and thriving. Last week when we were watching the news he said that he wanted to see President Bush again. When we asked why, he said, "He looks like he needs a hug."

Thomas was lucky; Benjamin and Elizabeth were not. Official United Nations policy needlessly condemns thousands of children to difficult futures in poor and war-ravaged countries. Some feel that it is necessary to give the U.N. a humanitarian role in postwar Iraq in order to rehabilitate that organization. Given the reality of its allegedly "humanitarian" policies, not to mention the widespread corruption and arrogance that accompanies its administration, it is fair to ask whether rehabilitation is possible.

Our government must decide whether geopolitical objectives require us to turn part of the administration of postwar Iraq over to the U.N. At a minimum, we should ask Prime Minister Blair and others who advocate this policy whether they really want to condemn thousands of Iraqi children to the same fate as Benjamin and Elizabeth.

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