



**Sending list:**

Social committee of the Riksdag (Riksdagens socialutskott)  
Parties of the Swedish Parliament through their group leaders  
Ministry of Health and Social Affairs  
Ministry of Justice  
Family Law and Parental Support Authority (MFOF)  
The Ombudsman for Children in Sweden (Barnombudsmannen)  
Adoptionscentrum

**Notification to:**

Associations for adoptees  
Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKL)  
The National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen)

Appeal from the Association of Ethiopian and Eritrean adoptees, AEF, March 13, 2018

## There is no Swedish legislation protecting inter-country adoptees' right to know their origin.

The Association of Ethiopian and Eritrean adoptees, AEF<sup>1</sup> state that a shift of paradigm is needed in Sweden regarding the view upon the adoptee's rights to their origin.<sup>2</sup> The AEF does this in the light of the inadequate handling of adoptions from Ethiopia and Eritrea to Sweden that members of the AEF personally have experienced and received information on. Unethical and illegal processes in connection with inter-country adoptions are exposed over and over again and as late as this year the Swedish Television, SVT, has reported on irregularities in adoptions from Chile.<sup>3</sup> For us who have been adopted, questions about our origin, our history and the conditions for our belonging come to a head. No one knows how many adoptions that have actually been unethically executed or between which countries these have been carried out. But adoptees from Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, India and Sri Lanka have in appeals left deeply disturbing descriptions implicating that the problems could affect thousands of inter-country adoptees only in Sweden.<sup>4</sup>

From what we know now it is not reasonable to keep believing that irregularities in inter-country adoption processes are about a single, unfortunate circumstance in a separate country. Rather it seems to be a matter of deliberate and systematic patterns based on unequal power relations between people in different countries. Patterns and structures that can turn vulnerable children and families into human trade goods when politicians, legislators and

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<sup>1</sup> The AEF (Adopterade etiopiers och eritreaners förening), is a national NGO for adult adoptees from Ethiopia and Eritrea in Sweden. The AEF was founded in 1996 and is politically and religiously independent. The association has approximately 50 members and arranges various activities to shed light on experiences of being an adult adoptee from Ethiopia and Eritrea in Sweden. Web page: [aefinfo.wordpress.com](http://aefinfo.wordpress.com)

<sup>2</sup> This issue has previously been addressed by the AEF in the petition *Adoption Begins with an Adoption Process, but the Life of the Adoptee Begins at Birth*.

<sup>3</sup> Media coverage on SVT about Chile 2018-01-30: <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vast/chilensk-domare-utredning-adoptioner-till-sverige>. Examples of other countries where irregularities in inter-country adoptions have been reported previously are Guatemala, Haiti, Cambodia, India, Liberia, Nepal, Nigeria, Romania and Tahiti according to: Hailu, D. (2017). Children for Families: An Ethnography of Illegal Inter-country Adoption from Ethiopia. *Adoption Quarterly*, (3), 201-221; and Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography for the 34:th session of the UN Human Rights Council (A/HRC/34/55) <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G16/440/24/PDF/G1644024.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>4</sup> Bolivia: [https://www.facebook.com/teresa.norman.10/posts/10155022472747504?hc\\_location=ufi](https://www.facebook.com/teresa.norman.10/posts/10155022472747504?hc_location=ufi), Chile: <http://chileadoption.se/>; <http://www.fria.nu/artikel/132510>; <http://www.friatidningen.se/artikel/132421>; Colombia: <http://www.fria.nu/artikel/132488>, Indien: <https://asikt.dn.se/asikt/debatt/indienadopterade-maste-fa-veta-sanningen-om-sitt-ursprung/>, Sri Lanka: <http://www.fria.nu/artikel/132505>.

authorities lack in supervision and following up on adoption processes. With this appeal, the AEF wishes to highlight some of the shortcomings that we perceive in the Swedish legislation concerning our right as adoptees to our origin, as well as the shortcomings in supervision and following up that we know of concerning adoptions being carried out from Ethiopia and Eritrea to Sweden.

Ph.D. Mr Daniel Hailu has, in a scientific study from 2017<sup>5</sup>, shed light on what methods have been used to, in illegal ways, conduct inter-country adoptions from Ethiopia. Amongst other things, the study shows how lies and persuasion methods have been used to prompt families to give up their children and how inter-country adoptions have formed a lucrative business for shifty brokers, administrators and officials in poor environments. On January 10, 2018, the Ethiopian parliament chose to definitively ban Ethiopian children being set up for inter-country adoption, due to present knowledge, experience and insights on the risks for child trade in connection with inter-country adoptions, as well as concerns regarding the psychosocial situation for adoptees in their new home countries.<sup>6</sup> The decision was made after gradually implemented restrictions over the last years, as several irregular conducts and tragedies in relation to inter-country adoptions from Ethiopia had come to light.

Over the years the Swedish government has given support and encouragement to approximately 60 000 agreements on adoption with different countries. That makes Sweden the country that has carried out the largest number of inter-country adoptions per capita. Therefore, we must also ask ourselves: How is it possible that fabrication of orphan children for adoption to Sweden amongst others, could continue for so long without the Swedish people and the Swedish government knowing, questioning and being upset with what is happening? As adoptees, we also ask ourselves: How is it possible that some of our Ethiopian mothers and fathers have been walking under the same sky as us during all these years, wondering if their children are alive, where they live and what has happened to them? This at the same time as some of us, their children, have walked here, in this country, thinking the parents were dead, not able to take care of us, had forgotten about us or did not want to take interest in us? These are questions that we adoptees have to relate to throughout our lives and therefor the government has to take its responsibility for the rights of adoptees long after the closure of the adoption process.

“Where do you come from? Have you met your real parents?” These are some of the most common questions we as inter-country adoptees meet from children, adults, friends, brief acquaintances and strangers in the street. Some of us can answer because we have the answers. The majority of us only have fragments of our origins and our roots to answer with. Many of us who have been adopted from Ethiopia and Eritrea have discovered that our adoption documentation contains inexplicable gaps, pure falsifications and plain lies. Yes, there are examples of complete adoption processes that have been carried out properly.

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<sup>5</sup> Hailu, D. (2017). Children for Families: An Ethnography of Illegal Inter-country Adoption from Ethiopia. *Adoption Quarterly*, 20 (3), 201-221. doi:10.1080/10926755.2017.1289490

<sup>6</sup> For example Reuters 2018-01-15: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-adoption-ban/ethiopia-adoption-ban-may-curb-trafficking-but-poorest-families-need-support-idUSKBN1F427L>

Adoptions where the data is correct and where the option is sometimes offered to keep or regain contact with the original family after adoption. But many of us have tried to get information about our history and ourselves in vain, because the information has turned out to be lost, hidden, falsified or deliberately destroyed.

Some of us have though our own extensive searches, often by luck or coincidence, managed to find birth parents that evidently lost custody of their child or children through illegal transactions approved by Swedish authorities. Some of us have been approached by Ethiopian relatives that have waited, longed and searched for the children they were promised would come back. Some of us have found birth parents who have grieved and despaired that they were once deceived into giving up their child.

There is no Swedish law protecting us inter-country adoptees when we ask for something as fundamental as answers to where we come from, whom we come from and our own history. There are adopters that have not saved any adoption documents at all and there are adopters who refuse to hand over the documents they have to the adoptee.<sup>7</sup> There are also those of us adoptees, who have not dared or do not dare to talk openly with our adopters about our birth countries or our histories, due to fear of making them upset.

The AEF opines that many of the tribulations adoptees have encountered in search for our roots result from the government not having observed and supervised the mediation of inter-country adoptions in a sufficiently legally certain way for the child. Many of us who were adopted in the end of the 1960's and during the 1970's, do not even know through who we are adopted. This is because the mediation of adoptions sometimes was carried out in collaboration with an adoption organization and a Swedish private mediator, sometimes through an adoption organization only and sometimes though private mediators only. Today we know of several serious examples of irregular conduct when an adoption organization as well as private mediators have been involved in the adoptions.

The Swedish NGO *Adoptionscentrum* is the organization that has mediated the majority of adoptions from Ethiopia and Eritrea to Sweden. Many of us have contacted them for assistance in search of our roots and many have then been called not to search for their origin, have had trouble obtaining their documents and/or experienced unprofessional responses. Some of us have had to wait too long for answers, others have not received any answers at all, whereas some of us have been given false and outdated information that in practice has aggravated further investigations.

The maybe most extensive example that we know of, where the government follow up has been deficient, concerns over 100 adoptions, the majority mediated by *Adoptionscentrum* to Sweden in the 1970's. In this case families in a poor area, Shiromeda in Addis Ababa, were persuaded to hand over their children with the promise that the children would return when

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<sup>7</sup> In Swedish we have chosen to use the Swedish equivalents to the expressions *adopter* rather than adoptive parent and *adoptee* rather than adoptive child, since we who have written this appeal have been adults for a long time. Most of us are older than those who become parents though adoption today and many of us are parents ourselves.

they grew older. Later on, a man in Ethiopia was convicted for the illegal actions but no information has been transmitted from the Swedish organizations or authorities concerned to adoptees in Sweden who origin from Shiromeda and therefore could be affected by the events. Instead, the AEF received this information thanks to some adoptees who, on their own, had got in touch with their Ethiopian relatives in Shiromeda, Ethiopia.

Another example regards a Swedish woman who, amongst other activities, worked on behalf of *Adoptionscentrum* in Ethiopia. Meanwhile, she simultaneously ran a private children's home on her lot in combination with a guest house where adopters to be could stay during their visit to pick up children for adoption. For these services the woman took significant payment without any Swedish authority giving response to the ethical and moral risks or conflicts of interest.

The private mediators of children from Ethiopia and Eritrea were mostly Swedish women. They were either accompanying wives or they themselves worked for example within aid agencies and churches in Ethiopia. Throughout the years some of them have given us adoptees information and documentation on our adoptions. Information that sometimes align with the information we have been given from our adopters and sometimes, to our surprise and concern, has not corresponded at all. Some of the mediating women have contacted adoptees in recent years, telling them that they regret what they have done. Other Swedish mediators have declined contact and refused to hand over information when adoptees have contacted them afterwards.

Some years ago, one of the private mediators who had mediated several adoptions from Ethiopia to Sweden, passed away. A member of the AEF contacted her children with the intention to ask them to hand over all remaining documents to The Swedish National Archives.<sup>8</sup> But instead the adoptee was informed by the mediator's children that they had decided to destroy all documents. We know that there are other Swedish mediators who, just like this woman, still hold documents in their possession. Documents with profoundly personal information on us adoptees. Information that we as adoptees currently have no possible way to demand access to, since the law states that these documents are the private belongings of the mediators.

In mid-February, 2018, the AEF sent a petition to the Swedish Riksdag and Government as well as to authorities concerned, where we stated eight forward-thinking demands to strengthen the rights of adoptees and to modernize inter-country adoptions to Sweden.<sup>9</sup> These are not excessive demands we list, but so far the response from those concerned has been weak.<sup>10</sup> However the Government has since then put forward the bill "Modernare

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<sup>8</sup> The Swedish National Archives is a public authority that collect and preserve records from government, public bodies, organizations and individuals from the Middle Ages onwards. <https://riksarkivet.se/startpage>

<sup>9</sup> The petition *Adoption begins with an adoption process, but the life of the adoptee begins at birth* February 13, 2018, <https://aefinfo.files.wordpress.com/2018/02/aef-skrivelse-180213.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> So far, we have only received a notification from the The National Board of Health and Welfare, February 23, 2018, that they no longer have an instruction to work targeted towards inter-country adoptions, and an invitation received on March 13,

adoptionsregler” (*More modern rules for adoption*)<sup>11</sup> based on a report from year 2009.<sup>12</sup> A bill that we perceive has the needs of adopters at the heart and reduces the rights of children and adoptees to a minimum.

The origin of a human is of such vital importance to her identity that the right to it is written in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.<sup>13</sup> Considering the number of occasions that we adoptees get questions on where we origin from, it is remarkable how absent the right to our origin is in Swedish legislation. It is about time that Sweden takes responsibility for the over 60 000 agreements on inter-country adoption of children that the government has given its support and encouragement to over the years. We demand that an independent commission urgently investigate the irregularities that have occurred in adoption processes. The commission should also take a stand on how to support adoptees in search of their roots as well as on how qualified psychosocial support should be organized in the future, in order to protect the rights of adoptees. This is the least Sweden can do in respect of our countries of origin, for us as adoptees and for those birth parents who in illegal ways have lost their children through adoptions to Sweden.

Stockholm, March 13, 2018

Association of Ethiopian and Eritrean Adoptees, AEF

We are looking forward to your feedback by email: [aefkontakt@gmail.com](mailto:aefkontakt@gmail.com)

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from the Family Law and Parental Support Authority to participate in a meeting for organizations of adoptees on March 26:th.

<sup>11</sup> Prop. 2017/18:121, <http://www.regeringen.se/4933fc/contentassets/70f6c57b333b4d61bb4ac5155209bf4a/modernare-adoptionsregler-prop.-201718121>

<sup>12</sup> SOU 2009:61. A committee report based on the report “Modernare adoptionsregler” (*More modern rules for adoption*) from the year 2008.

<sup>13</sup> The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, articles 7, 8 and 21.  
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>