

Recognizing and Supporting the Victims of Illegal International Adoption and taking Measures to Prevent this Practice

(Standing Committee on Peace and International Security)

Resolution adopted by consensus by the 151st IPU Assembly (Geneva, 23 October 2025)

The 151st Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union,

Recalling the fundamental principles of human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1966, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989, in particular its Article 21, as well as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2006, all of which emphasize the primacy of the best interests of the child, principles reaffirmed in the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children of 1990 and in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,

Referring in particular to Article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which relates to birth registration and the right to identity, as well as to Article 8, which obliges States Parties to provide appropriate assistance in re-establishing the identity of a child who has been illegally deprived thereof,

Referring also to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, adopted in 2000, in particular its Article 3, and the 2009 Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children,

Taking into consideration international conventions, such as the 1993 Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption, that aim to ensure that intercountry adoptions are lawful, and in the best interests of the child, and respect his or her fundamental rights, while preventing the abduction, sale and trafficking of children, and recognizing that some States, consistent with their domestic laws and cultural or religious principles, provide for alternative child care and placement systems, such as guardianship or kafala, instead of adoption as defined in the 1993 Hague Convention,

Acknowledging the particular vulnerability of children who are internationally displaced due to conflict, as recognized by the Hague Recommendation on Refugee Children,

Acknowledging also the growing global movement of illegally adopted individuals who are courageously advocating for justice and remedies for the grave human rights violations they have endured, and affirming their fundamental rights to truth, identity and redress, and their right to meaningful participation in all relevant processes affecting their lives,

Recognizing that illegal intercountry adoption compromises the safety and dignity of children and families while undermining the integrity of lawful adoption systems and eroding trust among States, institutions and communities,

Noting the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, and in particular its Article 25, which requires States Parties to take the necessary,

Noting also the Joint statement on illegal intercountry adoption, issued on 29 September 2022 by the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances on behalf of several other UN bodies and special rapporteurs, which affirms that illegal adoptions may amount to crimes against humanity,

Referring to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime,

Recognizing that the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court classifies the deportation, transfer, or illegal adoption of children, particularly in times of armed conflict, as war crimes or crimes against humanity when committed as part of widespread or systematic attacks; recalling that relevant international mechanisms have acknowledged the gravity of such acts, including through the issuing of arrest warrants against the perpetrators of such crimes by the International Criminal Court; and emphasizing the importance of States' cooperation with these mechanisms to ensure justice, accountability and the protection of children in conflict situations,

Considering that illegal intercountry adoptions may constitute a form of human trafficking, and hinder progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, which serve as critical enablers of peace and prosperity, in particular target 16.2, which aims to “end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children”,

Considering also that it is of utmost importance for parliaments, together with their governments, to raise public awareness of the negative impact of illegal intercountry adoption on children,

Recalling the resolution Orphanage trafficking: The role of parliaments in reducing harm, adopted at the 147th IPU Assembly on 27 October 2023, and the resolution Parliamentary impetus to local and regional development of countries with high levels of international migration and to stopping all forms, including state-sponsored, of human-trafficking and human rights abuses, adopted at the 145th IPU Assembly on 15 October 2022, which reaffirmed “the right of every human being to be free from arbitrary deportation by a foreign power, such as the Russian Federation’s forced displacement of Ukrainian civilians, including thousands of children, from the temporarily occupied territories to the Russian Federation”,

Deeply concerned by the persistence of illegal intercountry adoptions, often involving child trafficking, forced separations, and identity falsifications, which constitute serious violations of children’s rights and inflict lasting trauma on victims, their families and their communities,

Aware that these illegal adoptions create devastating situations for children, who, as victims, suffer from a vicious circle of multiple losses, including loss of identity and cultural heritage, biological family, psychological stability, protection from abuse and exploitation, and often civil rights, and are sometimes exposed to ideological

indoctrination, making an immediate and adequate response essential to address these injustices,

Recognizing that there are three categories of victims in these situations: the children, who may face challenges related to their roots, cultural identity, and ties with their biological parents; the biological parents, who are deprived of their fundamental right to care for their child, often resulting in grief; and the adoptive parents, who may have been misled by intermediaries or authorities, and who may suffer distress or feelings of guilt upon discovering the circumstances of the adoption,

Recognizing also that illegally adopted children may be exposed to forms of exploitation such as begging, prostitution and pornography, drug trafficking, or recruitment by armed groups, particularly in the context of armed conflicts,

Deeply concerned by various reports published by United Nations specialized agencies, in particular UNICEF and its partners, on the situation of children in armed conflict zones and the alarming increase in cases of abduction, unlawful detention, illegal adoption, identity falsification and military recruitment of victims by armed groups, especially terrorist and separatist groups; and recalling that the military recruitment of children is considered “a war crime” and is prohibited by international conventions and treaties, in particular the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption, the Vancouver Principles, and the Paris Principles,

Recalling that, in the context of armed conflicts, Article 50 of the Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits an Occupying Power from changing the personal status of a child, including through adoption,

Specifying that the administrative consequences for victims of illegal adoptions can also lead to human rights violations as they relate to nationality and identity, creating obstacles in accessing education, marriage, name changes or legally recognizing a child,

Emphasizing that many children who are victims of illegal adoption remain unaware of their status until adulthood, and that this could be taken into consideration regarding limitation periods of crimes,

Emphasizing also that adoption procedures must be transparent, and that, in particular, financial aspects, the prevention of closed adoption practices and the oversight of adoption bodies, including private agencies, by the State or independent entities, must be strengthened to prevent abuses and to ensure respect for the full rights and best interests of the child,

Emphasizing further that international collaboration and cooperation, using relevant international instruments to curb illegal intercountry adoption, will minimize this criminal practice against children,

Recognizing that gender-based discrimination and violence, often rooted in patriarchal norms and moral and religious constructs regarding the social or marital status of the mother, the exclusion of persons belonging to minorities and Indigenous Peoples, and gaps in national legislation, have been key drivers of illegal adoption,

Aware that limited domestic care options, corruption, economic hardship, poverty, disability, helplessness, migration, forced displacement, parental incarceration, substance abuse and lack of social support from relevant authorities are additional driving factors behind the unnecessary separation of children from their families and must be duly taken into account,

Recognizing the essential role of parliaments in preventing, monitoring and punishing practices that violate children's rights, and in harmonizing national legislation with international human rights standards,

Recognizing also that new technologies, including artificial intelligence and digital recordkeeping, can play a vital role in the prevention and detection of identity fraud related to illegal adoptions,

Aware that international conflicts and instability create conditions conducive to the operation of child trafficking networks, including those involved in illegal adoptions,

Concerned that illegal adoptions, as a modern form of trafficking in persons, are increasingly facilitated through digital platforms and online networks, which pose new challenges for prevention and enforcement,

1. Urges States that are not currently Contracting Parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and/or to the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption to strengthen their national child adoption frameworks in line with the Conventions' principles, including by considering the possibility of adopting the relevant and necessary procedures to acquire such status; and reaffirms that States Parties must ensure and promote the proper functioning of legal procedures for intercountry adoption in accordance with the best interests of the child;

2. Urges all States, regardless of whether they are parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child or the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption, to formally acknowledge the existence of illegal intercountry adoptions and their impact on the children and their families, and to implement the necessary legal, administrative and investigative measures to bring to account those responsible and to prevent their occurrence and recurrence, in accordance with relevant international agreements, while maintaining confidence in legal adoptions carried out in accordance with international standards;

3. Also urges all States to formally recognize the persons affected by illegal intercountry adoptions (adopted children, biological parents and adoptive parents) as victims, to issue an apology and commit to providing them with appropriate support, protection, access to justice, remedies and, where possible, reunification; finding a balance between recognizing suffering and ensuring accountability for those involved, making it clear that legal adoptions remain a valid form of protection and should not be stigmatized;

4. Condemns in the strongest terms the unlawful deportation, transfer and adoption of children from occupied territories, and stresses that such acts constitute grave breaches of international humanitarian law;

5. Also condemns the transfer of thousands of Ukrainian children by the Russian Federation from occupied territories, which facilitates unlawful adoption and constitutes a violation of the Russian Federation's obligations under international humanitarian law,

including the prohibition on interfering with the personal identity, nationality and family ties of children as set out in Article 50 of the Fourth Geneva Convention;

6. Urges States to assess the extent to which the national legal framework should classify illegal intercountry adoption as a form of human trafficking in accordance with their respective legal systems, and to explore effective measures for the prevention of such practices; and further urges parliaments to adopt legislation defining the military recruitment of persons who were victims of illegal intercountry adoptions as a war crime;

7. Urges parliaments to advocate for the establishment of national protocols for reporting and investigating allegations of child trafficking, abduction and sale in intercountry adoption, as proactive measures to detect and address such acts; these protocols must ensure accessible reporting mechanisms, independent and transparent investigation and the protection of all victims;

8. Calls upon parliaments to conduct independent investigations to identify legislative, administrative or judicial failures that allowed these illegal adoptions, and to take both concrete steps to remedy these failures and reparative measures to ensure justice is delivered to victims of such practices and support them;

9. Also calls upon parliaments to introduce or strengthen legal sanctions for individuals or institutions — including private agencies, healthcare workers and officials — found complicit in illegal adoption practices;

10. Urges the strengthening of international cooperation and the establishment of regional and multilateral task forces to coordinate efforts against illegal intercountry adoptions to prevent them, and to promote the exchange of good practices that strengthen legal systems for intercountry adoption, through existing bilateral or multilateral arrangements and relevant international instruments, enhanced monitoring systems, information exchange between States, joint investigations and the sanctioning of criminal networks involved in these activities, as well as through aligning legal practices and cooperation with international justice mechanisms, including the International Criminal Court, in investigating and prosecuting cases of unlawful deportation and adoption of children;

11. Urges the various United Nations agencies, in particular the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees and UN peacekeeping missions, to contribute to the prevention of illegal intercountry adoptions, in particular by establishing a register of persons who are victims of illegal intercountry adoptions in areas of armed conflict;

12. Calls upon parliaments to actively address the underlying drivers of illegal intercountry adoptions, with particular attention to gender stereotypes related to a mother's social or marital status, xenophobia, poverty and discrimination, such as the targeting of specific population groups, including ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, migrants, refugees and Indigenous Peoples; and stresses that the adoption of children from ethnic groups must respect their rights, particularly their right to preserve their cultural, linguistic and ethnic identity, in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child;

13. Also calls upon parliaments to enact legislation to regulate the activities of private adoption agencies;

14. Further calls upon parliaments to prevent illegal intercountry adoptions by strengthening social protection systems, investing in parenting support, and ensuring access to essential services;

15. Urges States to develop and implement secure, centralized digital systems for tracking adoption procedures, including biometric data and digital birth registration, to prevent falsification of identity and ensure accountability;

16. Calls upon States, in cooperation with civil society and international actors, to support and, where necessary, establish mechanisms for the identification, tracing and return of unlawfully deported or adopted children, ensuring their best interests, including family reunification or appropriate care in their country of origin, and the restoration of their legal identity and nationality;

17. Also calls upon States to establish financial and structural support for victims of illegal intercountry adoptions, including:

(a) Facilitated access to archives to help victims trace their origins;

(b) Guarantees that the potential annulment of their adoption does not result in any loss of civil rights, nationality or identity;

(c) Psychological, legal, social and administrative assistance for victims and their families that is accessible, with associated fees waived for victims;

(d) Facilitation of name changes to reclaim lost identities;

(e) Elimination of the statute of limitations for such offences, allowing victims who discover the truth later to still pursue legal action;

(f) The establishment of DNA databases with due consideration for privacy, informed consent and related safeguards;

(g) The establishment of language re-learning and cultural reintegration programmes for illegally adopted persons wishing to reconnect with their country of origin;

(h) The inclusion of victims' organizations in processes related to truth-seeking, opening of archives, legal support, and public awareness-raising;

(i) The creation of national or international trust funds to finance legal aid, DNA testing, therapy and travel for victims of illegal adoptions seeking justice or family reunification;

18. Urges States to include case studies of illegal intercountry adoptions in the training programmes of judges, prosecutors, lawyers, police officers, social workers, and diplomats, especially consuls, in order to strengthen their capacity to identify and address such situations;

19. Also urges States to strengthen comprehensive cooperation with one another, including through bilateral, regional and multilateral mechanisms, in order to share best practices, lessons learned, and success stories in adoption processes, while ensuring that such practices are consistent with internationally binding legal instruments;

20. Urges parliaments to recommend that their respective governments establish reparative measures for victims through legal compensation mechanisms, as well as through support in tracing their origins;

21. Also urges parliaments to recommend that their respective governments promote increased vigilance in conflict zones and humanitarian crises, where the risk of illegal intercountry adoptions and child trafficking, as well as the military recruitment of children, is heightened, by reinforcing child protection measures in these contexts, ensuring that the rights and specific needs of women and girls are fully addressed, as they are among the groups most vulnerable to violations in situations of conflict and humanitarian emergencies; and, where appropriate, temporarily suspending intercountry adoptions in those areas and focusing on training officials in the detection of child abduction at borders, airports and maritime crossings;

22. Urges States and parliaments to strengthen the monitoring and regulation of digital platforms to prevent their misuse in facilitating illegal adoptions and related trafficking activities;

23. Encourages the establishment of senior official-level platforms for regular dialogue and technical assistance to enhance transparency, oversight and accountability in intercountry adoption systems;

24. Urges States to collaborate with international bodies such as the United Nations and the International Criminal Court to address cases of illegal intercountry adoptions and the military recruitment of victims within an international justice framework and recognize these acts as serious human rights violations that may constitute crimes against humanity, and to propose new avenues of redress for victims;

25. Invites States to consider adopting relevant legislation that would create a legal basis for prosecuting perpetrators of the crime of illegal adoption on a universal level;

26. Urges parliaments to prioritize national adoption to preserve children's social and cultural ties, and to ensure that adoptions in conflict zones are carried out only through internationally recognized agencies such as the United Nations or the International Committee of the Red Cross;

27. Calls upon parliaments to raise awareness among authorities and the general public, through information campaigns and, where appropriate, to include in school curricula and broader educational modules the importance of transparent adoption procedures that comply with international law and ethical principles;

28. Urges parliaments to ensure effective, well-resourced and independent oversight of adoption processes, guaranteeing that decisions are made with transparency and full respect for the best interests of the child and that whistle blowers and witnesses are protected from retaliation, thereby safeguarding the credibility of legal intercountry adoptions;

29. Calls on the competent authorities to ensure that the public acknowledgment of cases of illegal intercountry adoptions does not result in the stigmatization of adopted children, by establishing strict safeguards for confidentiality and the protection of identity;

30. Invites States and their parliaments to preserve their archives and ensure the collection of reliable data on cases of illegal intercountry adoptions and the military recruitment of victims, where appropriate in collaboration with international institutions, in order to assess the scale of the phenomenon and improve policy responses, and to collect and share data on good practices in legal adoption systems;

31. Urges States to integrate a gender-responsive perspective and apply the principle of non-discrimination in line with international human rights standards, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, into all measures aimed at preventing and combating illegal intercountry adoption, as well as when providing remedies and support to victims, and to ensure that the rights and specific needs of women and girls are fully addressed;

32. Invites States and parliaments to adopt policies that strengthen and promote legal systems for intercountry adoption to provide children deprived of parental care with the opportunity for a safe and loving family environment, in accordance with international law;

33. Invites the Inter-Parliamentary Union and national parliaments to strengthen their cooperation with the relevant United Nations bodies with a view to implementing action plans to prevent illegal intercountry adoptions; and urges the IPU Executive Committee to consider the proposal for the IPU and its partners to organize a parliamentary conference on the prevention of illegal intercountry adoptions