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International Reference Centre for the Rights of Children Deprived of their Family (ISS/IRC)

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HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

HOPING FOR 2013 TO ALLOW US TO CONTINUE WORKING TOGETHER IN ORDER FOR THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN TO BECOME A REALITY!

EDITORIAL

The ISS/IRC in 2012: Achievements and the challenges ahead

The ISS/IRC would like to end the year with an assessment of all the activities and projects carried out successfully in 2012 and to present its future plans for the protection of children deprived of their family.

Progress and future plans relating to the 'Adoption and disability' project

Since 2011 – which is the year the ISS/IRC, in collaboration with *Médecins du Monde*, launched the 'Helping children with disabilities to find a family' project (see Monthly Review N°9/2011), much progress has been made to provide these children with a permanent family life plan. The first phase of this project is now coming to an end. The main achievements of this initial stage, which was designed to identify the beneficiaries and also the mechanisms that might prevent their adoption, were essentially the following: the completion of a pilot version of a practical manual aimed at professionals, and the first version of a life book aimed at the children themselves.

Both tools, developed to train professionals and provide children in institutions with their own space in which they can write down their emotions and life events, will be tested in the first two pilot countries, Vietnam and Azerbaijan. The great success of the missions carried out in both countries and the fruitful collaboration with the competent authorities bode well for the adoption of these children soon being incorporated into their child protection system and for it to become a real life option for them.

In 2013, the ISS/IRC intends to work on the formalisation of an agreement with Senegal and Peru, aimed at continuing to roll out this valuable project.

The constant presence of the ISS/IRC in countries of origin

The ISS/IRC's commitment and its experience in the field of protecting children deprived of their family were exceeded in 2012, especially in Vietnam and Africa. Regarding Vietnam, the "Study on the root causes of child abandonment in Vietnam" – a project launched in 2011 on the basis of a recommendation by UNICEF and the Vietnamese government, with the objective of carrying out an assessment mission on the main causes of abandonment, relinquishment and the separation of children from their families – is now in its final phase. Its conclusions will be presented in a Review in early 2013.

In terms of the ISS/IRC's involvement in its support to African countries, the latter has, at first, actively participated in the preparation of the

conference organised by the African Child Policy Forum on the issue of intercountry adoption in Africa (see Monthly Review N°6/2012) and, above all, in the drafting of the final conclusions. Secondly, the ISS/IRC recently participated in the Francophone Workshop on the Hague Convention intended for all Western African Central Authorities with the dual purpose of reflecting on the stages prior to the ratification of the Convention in those countries that have not yet ratified it and to improve its implementation in those countries, which have indeed ratified it. The ISS/IRC, in addition to being involved in the current process of reflection, intends to pursue its cooperation on this issue throughout 2013.

ISS's constant commitment to the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children

In 2012, the ISS has strengthened its leading role in the promotion and implementation of the Guidelines vis-à-vis the United Nations. Recently, the ISS, jointly with SOS Children's Villages, has been carrying out mainstreaming activities across the treaty bodies in order to raise their awareness of the Guidelines and, if necessary, make reference to them in their concluding observations to the States. To this day, the Guidelines have been presented before the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities - which finally incorporated ISS's recommendations into its concluding observations in relation to Argentina, Chile and Hungary; the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Committee Against Torture and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Furthermore, ISS successfully carried out two planned phases of the development of the Guidelines' Implementation and Monitoring Handbook. Thanks to close collaboration with key allies (see p. 10), it was possible to conduct an analysis of 70 examples from the regions concerned with these issues and carry out a field evaluation in Argentina (RELAF) and Malawi (Everychild, BCN and UNICEF). The final phase, planned for the end of December, intends to present the final version of the Handbook and its French and Spanish translations.

The ISS/IRC addresses the new frontiers of International Private Law

The ISS/IRC provided a detailed reflection on the new frontiers of intercountry adoption and its financial abuses. This reflection was conducted in two different, yet complementary, ways: the study 'Investigating the grey zones of intercountry adoption' – a tool that analyses the theoretical and technical obstacles that currently prevent the full protection of children against all forms of trade and also makes several recommendations in the fight against these abusive practices; and the participation in the Informal Group of Experts of the Hague Conference on the financial aspects of intercountry adoption and the reflection on good practices to combat abuse in this field.

For 2013, the ISS/IRC intends to carry out an investigation on the delicate issue of intercountry surrogacy and its implications in terms of child protection. This research will therefore focus on the rights of children, such as the right to access their origins, in the context of a potential international child protection instrument in this field.

The ISS/IRC's strong experience and its international commitment to the rights of the child will enable it to meet these considerable challenges and to play a leading role in all the significant steps that will take place in the areas mentioned thus far.

The ISS/IRC Team
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