

**PEAR Supports Ethica's Call for Input on JCICS Proposed
Standards of Practice
January 16, 2008**

Below is a letter from Linh Song, Executive Director of Ethica. PEAR supports Ethica's call for input from the VN adoption community and encourages all those interested in VN adoption and adoption reform to participate by writing your comments to Ethica. PEAR's Comments on the JCICS Proposed Standards of Practice were submitted to JCICS on December 10, 2007. Copies of our comments are available at <http://www.pear-now.org> or by contacting PEAR at reform@pear-now.org.

Dear Vietnam Adoption Community Members,

In November I attended the Joint Council on International Children's Services' Vietnam Summit. JCICS is the umbrella organization for many, but not all, adoption agencies facilitating international adoptions. Ethica is also a member as an adoption advocacy organization.

The Summit was convened in order to address the increasingly problematic situation in Vietnam, which included:

- Over 20 NOIDs (notice of intent to deny a child's visa) were issued in October-November 2007; 3 JCICS member agencies accounted for the majority of the NOIDs. Currently there are 26 NOIDs.*
- The new I600 procedure that was proposed and implemented in order to verify true orphan status of Vietnamese children.*
- The MOU between the U.S. and Vietnam that will be renegotiated in March with renewal in September 2008. However Vietnam has not fulfilled its promise of releasing a fee schedule, a key factor for successful renegotiation.*

It was also mentioned that there was evidence of:

- Moving children from unlicensed child welfare institutions into licensed orphanages in order to qualify for international adoption.*
- Adoption agencies contracting directly with maternity hospitals and matching children before they are relinquished to the orphanage.*
- Paying orphanage and provincial officials large sums of cash in order to secure referrals (children eligible for adoption).*
- Paying for travel junkets for orphanage and provincial authorities to tour the U.S.*

The theme of the meeting was for agencies to stop illegal activity in-country, stop paying facilitators contingency or finding fees, and to co-operate in creating an agency fee schedule to submit to the U.S. Department of State.

It was obvious to me during the discussion that unethical and illegal activity either paid for or promoted by American adoption agencies, and bidding wars between agencies for young children, were key factors leading to the current climate. Cash donations directly to orphanages were also an issue as more seasoned and reputable agency representatives reminded attendees that one of the MOU's goals was to have agency funding be directed to humanitarian projects and not unaccountable cash gifts.

Some agencies continue to insist that they are not responsible to verify orphan status and that receipts alone are adequate tracking methods. Ethica believes that this attitude is an indication that adoptive families need to be vocal about putting the responsibility on their agencies to fulfill their obligations in facilitating ethical and transparent adoptions.

Proposed JCICS standards were issued that agencies are currently commenting on. The timeline presented at the Summit has been changed to accommodate a delay due to staff changes at JCICS. The hope is for agencies to submit their fees to the organization and comments on the Vietnamese standards of practice by January 21.

Ethics is preparing our comments on the standards to submit at the end of Friday, January 18th. We would like to hear from parents any thoughts they have on what agencies should currently be doing in Vietnam, but are not currently doing. We will consider adding them to our comments. This is your chance for input on keeping Vietnamese adoptions open and continuing in an ethical and transparent manner.

Please email us at info@ethicanet.org by January 17th. Thank you.

*Linh Song, MSW
Executive Director
Ethica, Inc.*