

Madonna's International Adoption Attempt Fuels Debate

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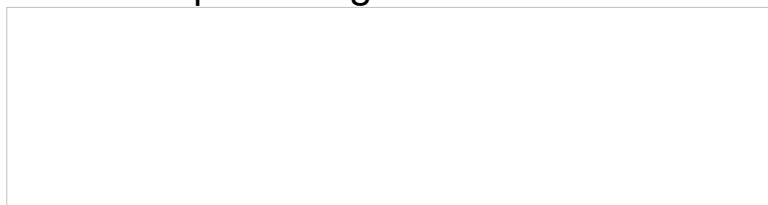
Anjolina Jolie and Kids **With nearly 600,000 children in the foster care system in North America, international adoption raises a few eyebrows.**

By Janine Theriault, Staff Writer

[Vietnam](#) suspended adoptions to the US last year because of concerns over child trafficking.

MONTREAL([RPRN](#)) 04/10/09 - In recent years, a slew of international [celebrity adoptions](#) by the likes of Madonna, Angelina Jolie, and Meg Ryan have highlighted what is an increasingly common practice for westerners seeking parenthood. But international adoptions in general, and celebrity adoptions in particular, are not without their critics.

Many detractors of international adoption fear the combination of wealthy westerners and poor foreign parents. In ruling against pop star Madonna's bid to adopt Malawi orphan Chifundo "Mercy" James last week, Judge Esme Chombo made reference to Malawi's residency requirements for potential adopters – citing it as the country's means of protecting its most vulnerable children.



“It is necessary that we look beyond the petitioner ... and consider the consequences of opening the doors too wide,” Judge Chombo said. “By removing the very safeguard that is supposed to protect our children, the courts ... could actually facilitate trafficking of children by some unscrupulous individuals.”

Madonna is not the only celebrity whose international adoption attempts have fueled controversy. Celebrity mom Angelina Jolie's multiple adoptions have also raised questions, about the practice.

The *Save the Children* charity's UK spokesman Dominic Nutt has also raised cultural concerns in voicing opposition to international adoptions, and Madonna's latest adoption attempt in particular.

“The best place for a child is in his or her family in their home community,” he says. “Most children in orphanages have one parent still living, or have an extended family that can care for them in the absence of their parents.” Nutt continues by arguing that foreign adoptions should happen only if a child does not have relatives, and all other options have been exhausted.

In response to concerns for the well being of internationally adopted children, the *Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in respect of Inter-country Adoption* was enacted to protect the member country's children from corrupt beneficiaries. When a child's country is not a member of this convention, adopting through a reputable agency helps

insure the welfare of the child, and the expediency of the adoption process.

Further criticism of international adoption contends that prospective parents, celebrity or otherwise, should look a little closer to home when searching for a child. According to the [U.S. Department of Health & Human Services](#), nearly 600,000 children are in the [foster care](#) system in North America, with more than 150,000 of them being available for adoption; 510,000 of these children are in the U.S. alone. Adding insult to this injury, a foster child in the U.S. may wait up to five years to be adopted, with the average waiting child already being eight years old.

Advocates of domestic adoption also point to a 2002 [National Adoption Attitudes Survey](#), which states that nearly 40 percent of American adults have considered adopting a child - this means if one in 500 of these adults adopted, every child currently in foster care would have a permanent home.

However, although the majority of adoptions in the U.S. are domestic, this option is not always possible. Many future parents find themselves choosing children from abroad only after exhausting more direct avenues to parenthood, including domestic adoption, writes *New York Times* ethics writer Randy Cohen.

“Sadly, as many people who have attempted this (domestic adoption) can confirm — and as some readers note — it’s not easy, and sometimes it’s all but impossible,” says Cohen.

Eligibility requirements for adoptive parents may be more strict within

western countries, where one's age, marital status, or sexual orientation amongst other attributes, may prove more of a boundary to a sought-after child domestically than in many foreign countries. Even after requirements are met and the process has been begun, stories of problematic and sometimes terminated domestic adoptions (largely birth-parent related) abound.

This contrasts with adopting internationally, where, once potential parents have satisfied minimal requirements within their home country for adoption, "you are practically guaranteed a child," states Mary M. Strickert, author of *International Adoption Guidebook*. The specter of indefinite wait-times and no certainty of taking a child home in domestic adoptions make the comparatively short average waiting time of 12 –18 months and the guarantee of orphan status offered by international adoptions attractive to some prospective parents.

Many may find the prospect of well-off westerners (especially celebrities, whose every motivation is publicly suspect) acquiring poor country's babies distasteful. But the continuance of the AIDS epidemic and civil war in many developing countries - and falling fertility rates in first world countries - fuel both supply and demand for international adoptions. Unless these concerns are properly addressed, the practice of adopting internationally is only likely to continue.

Source:

Vietnam: <http://adoption.state.gov/country/vietnam.html>

celebrity adoptions: <http://celebrities.adoption.com/>

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services:

http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/index.htm

foster care: <http://www.davethomasfoundation.org/Adoption-Facts/Myths>

National Adoption Attitudes Survey:

http://www.adoptioninstitute.org/survey/Adoption_Attitudes_Survey.pdf

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