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It's Not Just a Family Matter: Helping Those Involved in International Parental Child Abduction

DIPNOTE: TRAVEL

MICHELLE BERNIER-TOTH

BUREAU OF CONSULAR AFFAIRS

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International Child Abduction is a Crime.

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Imagine coming home to find your child taken abroad against your wishes. Or that your ex-spouse refuses to send your child home after an overseas visit. When one parent takes or keeps a child in violation of the other parent's custody rights, it's not just a "family matter," it's international parental child abduction. It is also a crime in the United States— but that is unfortunately not true in many other countries. U.S. custody orders are not always recognized in foreign countries, either. This means a left-behind parent may have to pursue custody through a foreign court – a process that can be extremely frustrating, costly, and time-consuming. In the meantime, the children involved may have little or no access to their left-behind parent.

That's why the [Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction](#) exists. The Convention is designed to provide a framework for resolving these cases of wrongful removal or retention as quickly as possible to limit the trauma to children and parents involved. The Convention operates on the premise that custody matters are best resolved in the country of a child's habitual residence – and that a judicial decision on where that habitual residence is should happen promptly. The United States, one of the original signatories to the Convention, actively encourages countries to join the Convention and to implement it fully and effectively.

In the United States, the Office of Children's Issues in the Bureau of Consular Affairs is responsible for implementing the Convention as the designated U.S. Central Authority. It also responds to cases where a child is taken to a country that is not a treaty partner. As well as helping left-behind parents pursue options for their child's return or access to their child, we work directly with foreign governments to encourage them to join the Convention or, if a treaty partner is not living up to its obligations, improve its compliance. To this end, the Department takes advantage of every appropriate opportunity to raise these important issues with host government officials.



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Congress has demonstrated its support for their constituents who are left-behind parents, recently passing a resolution that marked April 2021 as Countering International Parental Child Abduction Month. Members of Congress have also raised their constituents' cases with both the Department of State and foreign governments. Foreign lawmakers can benefit from the United States' experience creating and implementing legislation for the Convention and ensuring that courts have the authority and tools needed to implement return orders. As we look to the future, the Department of State's Office of Children's Issues will continue to work constructively with Congress and other stakeholders on behalf of our most vulnerable citizens – our children.

Visit [our website](#) to learn more about the Convention, steps you can take to prevent the abduction of your child, and resources that you can use in abduction cases.

For more from the Bureau of Consular Affairs, follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#). You can also visit our website at travel.state.gov.

About the Author: Michelle Bernier-Toth currently serves as the Special Advisor for Children's Issues in the Bureau of Consular Affairs, Office of Children's Issues at the U.S. Department of State.

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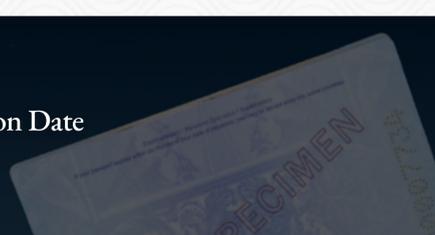
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