

RELEASE IN FULL

From: Muscatine, Lissa <MuscatineL@state.gov>
Sent: Friday, January 22, 2010 2:56 PM
To: H
Subject: news report on missing kids in Haiti

This is an AFP report from today.

Also, GTIP is working on a memo for you and Cheryl about child trafficking dangers in Haiti.

Trafficking fears as Haiti children go missing

Posted 5 hours 47 minutes ago

Updated 5 hours 46 minutes ago

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The UN has warned countries not to step up adoptions from Haiti in the wake of the disaster. (AFP: Matthew Marek)

United Nations officials say children have gone missing from hospitals in Haiti since the devastating January 12 earthquake, raising fears of trafficking for adoption abroad.

"We have documented around 15 cases of children disappearing from hospitals and not with their own family at the time," said UNICEF adviser Jean Luc Legrand.

"UNICEF has been working in Haiti for many years and we knew the problem with the trade of children in Haiti that existed already beforehand.

"Unfortunately, many of these trade networks have links with the international adoption market."

The agency said it had warned countries during the past week not to step up adoptions from Haiti in the immediate wake of the quake.

However several are fast-tracking adoption procedures already under way, including Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain and the United States.

Mr Legrand said the situation was similar to the aftermath of the tsunami in Asia five years ago.

Trafficking networks were springing into action immediately after the disaster and taking advantage of the weakness of local authorities and relief coordination "to kidnap children and get them out of the country".

Rupert Colville, a spokesman for the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said child enslavement and trafficking in Haiti was "an existing problem and could easily emerge as a serious issue over the coming weeks and months".

The UN mission in Haiti has stepped up surveillance of roads, UNICEF officials said.

Mr Legrand said there was separate but only anecdotal evidence of people taking children by road to the neighbouring Dominican Republic and loading children on to planes.

"We have seen over the past years many children being taken out of the country without any legal procedure," he said.

"This is going on. This is happening now. We are starting to have the first evidence of that, this is unquestionable."

He was unable to give details on the 15 missing children or their condition or clearly connect the anecdotal observations in Haiti's chaos with trafficking.

The cases were documented by social workers and by partner non-governmental organisations working for UNICEF in hospitals.

- AFP