

# U.S. Department of State

## Diplomacy in Action

### Diplomacy and Law Enforcement Unite to Dismantle Major International Adoption Fraud Scheme

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By Angela French, DSS Public Affairs



Addis Ababa," recalled Diplomatic Security Service (DSS) Special Agent Jamel Love.

That's what led Love to investigate International Adoption Guides, Inc. (IAG), a South Carolina company that arranged for the adoptions of Ethiopian children by U.S. citizens, for suspicion of adoption fraud. DSS' pursuit of the case led to the take down of a major international adoption company and four employees sentenced for their part in the adoption fraud scheme.

Love arrived at the U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in 2011. As the embassy's assistant regional security officer-investigator (ARSO-I), he was there to investigate passport and visa fraud, and assist in cases of crimes affecting U.S. citizens. ARSO-Is work closely with the Department of State's **Bureau of Consular Affairs** (<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/about.html>) officers who are responsible for adjudicating passport applications and other documents for U.S. citizens and foreign nationals. At Embassy Addis Ababa, the Consular section focused heavily on adoption fraud, so Love immediately delved into the massive collection of complaints about adoption agencies operating in Ethiopia.

"I noticed the more egregious and specific adoption fraud allegations were against IAG," recalls Love.

Love brought his findings to the embassy's Consular Section Chief Scott Riedmann, who agreed allegations against IAG should be explored further.

"Even before I went out to post, I was told that there were concerns about international adoptions in Ethiopia," said Riedmann. "It was clear to me after arriving in Addis that some of the agencies were engaging in unethical and fraudulent activities."

Love interviewed several purported victims of IAG's scheme and verified the stories of Ethiopian children adopted via IAG's services. He contacted his investigative colleagues at DSS' headquarters in Arlington, Virginia, to help dig further into the case and brought the South Carolina U.S. Attorney's Office on board. Given the volume of complaints against IAG, a few U.S.-based DSS analysts traveled to Addis Ababa to help with the interviews.

In addition to the interviews and checking law enforcement databases, the investigative team found several concerning stories online.

"A lot of blogs, websites, and discussion forums had detailed information about IAG's operation," said Love. "These actors were very well known throughout the large and vocal international adoption community and there was a wealth of information publicly available that let us know we were on the right track."

The adoption scheme depended on document fraud and bribes. IAG employees would submit doctored paperwork, including falsified visa applications and contracts, to the U.S. government to facilitate adoptions of Ethiopian children by U.S. parents. According to a Department of Justice [press release \(https://www.justice.gov/usao-sc/pr/founder-ceo-and-employee-international-adoption-guides-iag-sentenced-adoption-fraud\)](https://www.justice.gov/usao-sc/pr/founder-ceo-and-employee-international-adoption-guides-iag-sentenced-adoption-fraud), adoption contracts were signed by orphanages that could not properly give the children up for adoption for various reasons. Two IAG employees admitted to bribing two Ethiopian officials to facilitate the scheme.

During federal court hearings, the IAG executive director also admitted to making false statements to the Council on Accreditation (COA), the entity responsible for accrediting U.S.-based adoption agencies according to relevant laws and regulations.

On the diplomatic side, Riedmann led a multi-pronged approach to address the situation while DSS investigated. He worked with interagency partners and Ethiopian authorities to develop and implement a better orphan determination process. He also directed and enhanced communications with current and potential adopting parents in the United States, and created a public outreach program targeting rural Ethiopians to inform them about international adoptions.

For Riedmann, the case is an excellent example of how Department of State entities can combine diplomacy with law enforcement to combat crimes that affect both the United States and a host country.

"This case really highlights the excellent cooperation between Consular Affairs and DSS, and the effectiveness of the ARSO-I program," said Riedmann.

While the IAG case is a sad example of misconduct in the adoption process, Riedmann stressed that [intercountry adoptions \(https://travel.state.gov/content/adoptionsabroad/en/adoption-process/what-is-intercountry-adoption.html\)](https://travel.state.gov/content/adoptionsabroad/en/adoption-process/what-is-intercountry-adoption.html) can benefit both orphans and prospective parents. "Most of the stakeholders involved in international adoptions do excellent work finding homes for children who need them," stressed Riedmann. "The department seeks to ensure that intercountry adoptions involving children or U.S. parents take place in the best interests of the child. Taking action against entities like IAG eliminates bad actors helps to protect all those involved in intercountry adoptions."

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