International Child Abduction
(From www.travel.state.gov)

Parental child abduction is a tragedy. When a child is abducted across international borders, the difficulties are compounded for everyone involved. This pamphlet is designed to assist the adult most directly affected by international child abduction, the left-behind parent.

The Department of State considers international parental child abduction, as well as the welfare and protection of U.S. citizen children taken overseas, to be important, serious matters. We place the highest priority on the welfare of children who have been victimized by international abductions.

The Department of State's Office of Children's Issues (CA/OCS/CI) is designated to provide assistance to the left-behind parents of international parental child abduction. Since the late 1970's, we have been contacted in the cases of approximately 16,000 children who were either abducted from the United States or prevented from returning to the U.S. by one of their parents. This part of the website discusses what the Department of State can and cannot do to help you. In addition, because we are only part of the network of resources available to you, we mention other avenues to pursue when your child has been abducted across international borders. For example, you may wish to contact the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC).

The Office of Children’s Issues is prepared to assist you as you pursue recovery of your abducted child. Because it can be a bewildering experience, we have prepared both a questionnaire for the left-behind parents of children taken to countries not party to the Hague Abduction Convention and an application for left-behind parents of children taken to Hague Convention member countries.

To report an abduction case to CA/OCS/CI, call our office and follow-up with a copy of either the completed questionnaire or the completed application. Likewise, in order for us to provide the best service, we need to be informed of any developments in your case. Every child and every case is unique, and we will work with you to apply this information to your particular situation.

If you have questions, please call us at 202-736-9090. You may also fax us at 202-736-9133.

What the State Department Can Do:

- In cases where the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction applies, assist parents in filing an application with foreign authorities for return of the child.
- In other cases, through our embassies and consulates abroad, attempt to locate, visit and report on the child’s general welfare.
- Provide the left-behind parent with information on the country to which the child was abducted, including its legal system, family laws, and a list of attorneys there willing to accept American clients.
- In all cases, provide a point of contact for the left-behind parent at a difficult time.
- Monitor judicial or administrative proceedings overseas.
- Assist parents in contacting local officials in foreign countries or contact them on the parents behalf.
- List the child in a passport look-out database to alert the custodial parent to an application for a U.S. passport.
- Alert foreign authorities to any evidence of child abuse or neglect.
What the State Department Cannot Do:

- Reabduct the child.
- Help a parent to violate host country laws.
- Pay legal expenses or court fees.
- Act as a lawyer or represent parents in court.
- Give refuge to a parent involved in a re-abduction.