**Crisis Looms for South Africa’s Orphaned and Vulnerable Children**

***Focus on Adoption as a protection mechanism during Child Protection Week***

South Africans are in a state of shock and denial in respect of the crisis facing our orphaned, abandoned and vulnerable children, with the numbers of children who are in desperate need of a family of their own, steadily increasing. Current estimates of children who may benefit from adoption in South Africa are between 1.5 and 2 million in 2011. This coupled with a steady decrease in adoption rates is placing huge strain on alternative care systems, which in principle, should only be temporary solutions.

During Child Protection Week from 29 May to 2 June, the newly formed National Adoption Coalition will launch ‘Addoption’, a programme designed to draw attention to the plight of South Africa’s adoptable children and provide accurate process information to birth and prospective adoptive parents.

“Addoption” was born as a centralised, unified hub complete with a website and call centre to provide information and guidance for birth and prospective adoptive parents in terms of the adoption process, in fact for anyone in South Africa wanting to know more about adoption as an option. In addition it also provides an extensive database of adoption professionals across South Africa. This is the only resource of its kind that provides both adoption information and database resources in one, consolidated format.

For the first time in our country’s history, the South African adoption community including the National Department of Social Development has taken hands to form a National Adoption Coalition - a mandated and unified structure that promotes and builds awareness of adoption, builds partnerships and collaboration across the adoption community, shares best practices and acts as a mediator and champion.

The key focus of ‘Addoption’ is to educate and create awareness among South Africans about adoption as an option when deciding how to deal with a crisis pregnancy, how to become an adoptive parent, or how to extend a family through adoption. Our role is to assist the adoption community as a whole to create awareness and hence encourage the use of their services,” explains Sue Krawitz, a spokesperson for the National Adoption Coalition.

“The ultimate aim is to create positive and permanent change in the lives of the children of South Africa, to ensure a sustainable social solution for this country. Adoption is treated with great mistrust for a number of reasons in this country, and yet, it has been proven globally to be the best permanent solution for children outside of the family. The low prevalence of marriage in SA and resulting vulnerability of single mothers, the weakening of the traditional extended family, and the impact of poverty and HIV/Aids, has led to an alarming increase in abandoned babies. There is also a preference for foster care vs adoption, with nearly 40% of adoptable children in foster care currently in South Africa. This is not ideal, as it is not a permanent solution for the child, and gives them no sense of belonging or long term stability,” explains Sue.

As outcomes of the programme, ‘Addoption’ is aiming to create national awareness of adoption as an option, change adoption perceptions, attitudes and beliefs across communities and empower community opinion leaders to be advocates of adoption.

One of the biggest challenges facing anyone in a crisis pregnancy or for anyone interested in adopting, is finding consistent and accurate information about the process and who to go to for assistance. Through the Addoption call centre on **0800 864 658** and the website at [**www.adoption.org.za**](http://www.adoption.org.za)both birth parents and adoptive parents will have access to consistent, positive adoption communication and engagement as well as immediate access to correct adoption information.

**South Africa faces many unique challenges**

When one considers the alarming statistics, it soon becomes clear that the Addoption programme and the National Adoption Coalition have vitally important roles to play, in averting a very real and imminent crisis. There are over 18.8 million children in SA, almost two-fifths of the population. The estimated number of adoptable children exceeds 1.5 million, roughly 8% of all children, yet currently only 0.2% are adopted. Despite the high number of children deprived of parental care, the annual number of adoptions has remained low and static over the past five years, and showed a notable decrease in the 2008-2009 year.

There are a number of unique challenges that South Africa faces in finding adoptive parents as a child protection mechanism:

* South Africa is a diverse country, with different cultural groups who have unique cultural beliefs and practices impacting adoption. Up until now, adoption has not been “Africanised” to be more culturally appropriate and relevant.
* There is a shortage of prospective adoptive parents, especially from the African community.
* Adoption has not received widespread promotion at a national level.
* Recruitment of prospective adoptive parents is currently carried out in an ad hoc, localised manner by adoption agencies and its reach is limited by lack of financial support.
* The information on adoption is sparse and poorly distributed.
* There is a widespread lack of knowledge and understanding regarding the unique dynamics of adoption, the typical issues confronting adopted children and their families, the risk factors that undermine adoption, and the factors that stabilise, strengthen, and preserve adoptive families.
* The growing number of abandoned babies and children remains a serious concern, with many birth mothers unaware of their options, including adoption, or where to find reliable, non-judgemental counselling when faced with a crisis pregnancy.

For more information on ‘Addoption’ go to: [www.adoption.org.za](http://www.adoption.org.za)

For more information on the National Adoption Coalition go to: [www.adoptioncoalitionsa.org](http://www.adoptioncoalitionsa.org)

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