



**International
Social Service**
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ISS News

1. International Family Mediation

Cilgia Caratsch from the ISS network's General Secretariat in Geneva writes on developments in international family mediation.

Family Mediation currently has the opportunity to be promoted across borders. This recent development is related to the ever-increasing number of child abductions worldwide. In many cases, legal procedures involving two states are unsuccessful in dealing with parental responsibilities in the case of separation. About 10 years ago, the first experiences in international mediation were launched by committed practitioners who were dealing with a growing number of disputes within bi-national families. Their techniques proved to be rewarding, as the parties involved felt that the mediation process initiated a new type of parenting, in the best interest of the children, when the parents were unable to continue as a couple.



Danièle Ganancia, a judge who developed a mediation system for handling international child abductions within the

French Central Authority, states "International situations are the magnifying mirror to the tragedies that family separation can cause¹." The geographic displacement of a child creates a climate of pressure and fear. This reality, along with problems arising from cultural differences, far too often ends up in a judicial war and a situation of psychological violence. As international conventions are not applicable in all countries, the only viable solution seems to be an informal and negotiated settlement between the parents.

International political bodies and organisations are now clearly spelling out their readiness to invest effort in creating and/or strengthening international instruments to handle child abductions across borders through mediation. Under the guidance of professional associations of mediators and specialised

¹ « Les situations internationales sont le miroir grossissant des drames que peut engendrer une rupture », Danièle Ganancia, in : La médiation familiale internationale. La diplomatie au cœur des enlèvements d'enfants, 2007.

NGOs, the definition of ethical standards and guidelines on best practice is growing.

International Social Service has a role to play in this challenging project. Its action is based on the dynamic functioning of a worldwide network, leading its members in cooperating with each other to help families address international issues. ISS's expertise in intercountry cooperation and practical social work at an international level is fundamentally valuable. ISS is also both independent and neutral and therefore has no corporate interest to promote or defend.

For many years ISS has collectively worked on mediation training modules with other professionals in this field. In addition, seminars were held to provide ISS caseworkers with mediation-based working tools. More recently, a survey was conducted among ISS members to learn more about the legal status of mediation in their individual countries, and the use of mediation in handling intercountry cases. This documentation provides a solid foundation that will be further enhanced by the creation of a database, which will include a list of international mediators and mediation associations across the globe. ISS also envisions focusing on Prevention. As experiences in international mediation are

analysed and evaluated, it is increasingly clear that mediators highlight the importance of prevention in the process. As ISS members work very closely with administrative and judicial authorities, this provides a prime forum to promote mediation as a means to solve international family disputes before they degenerate into violent situations.

We believe there is a critical need to combine our efforts in pushing toward this ambitious project. Complementary expertise is necessary

to ensure the promotion of a discipline that is located at the crossroad between the protection of the law and the prevention of suffering. Therefore, ISS currently seeks: 1) to identify and learn of existing initiatives at the national and international level, 2) to reinforce its long-term partnership with The Hague Conference and, along with state authorities, to develop an enforceable instrument for handling cases of international child abductions, 3) to develop activities with a network of professional mediators.

“International Social Service(’s)... action is based on the dynamic functioning of a worldwide network, leading its members in cooperating with each other to help families address international issues.”

2. ISS International Council meeting / recent changes in the international network

*ISS Australia's Executive Director **Fionn Skiotis** writes about the recent meeting of ISS's International Council in Geneva, which saw significant changes to the network's structure introduced.*

The international network of ISS, of which ISS Australia is a member, has been considering an overhaul of its Statutes (its governing document) for some years – in a formal sense since the 2006 meeting of ISS's International Council, although the idea was first raised (by ISS Australia) some years prior to that. The 2009 International Council meeting in Cape Town, South Africa considered the matter again, but failed to deal with it in any conclusive way – instead, an Extraordinary meeting of the International Council was agreed, to be held in Geneva in May 2010 (Council meetings were normally held every three years) and to consider a

revised version of the proposed new Statutes, following a process of consultation and revision over the intervening year.

I recently attended the Extraordinary International Council meeting, from 6-7 May, at which the network considered a final draft of the proposed new Statutes. This meeting made up for any previous



indecisiveness by passing a resolution in favour of the new Statutes quite decisively - 51 in favour, 0 against (3 abstentions). The new Statutes provide clarity and a modern, transparent governance approach for the international body of ISS. The International

Council continues to exist as the membership base of the international network, although the category of individual member has been discontinued. The Council now elects, for a two year term, a 7 member Governing Board responsible for overseeing the network's affairs until the next International Council meeting.

The Governing Board replaces the previous approach of twin governance bodies, the Bureau and the Executive Committee (ExCo), the latter made up of the Executive Directors of branches and affiliated bureaus. The new Board is made up of an International President and Treasurer (still to be appointed), 4 members elected by the International Council from among those who sit on the governance bodies (or equivalents) of ISS branches and affiliated bureaus, and the Chair of the Professional Advisory Committee. The newly revamped PAC (which existed in a different form under the previous Statutes) is made up of the Executive Directors of all branches and affiliated bureaus – effectively it is a forum for the “CEOs” of the main ISS network members to discuss and address issues relevant to their work, and to have input into the Governing Board via the PAC Chair.

Elections conducted on the second day of the Extraordinary Council meeting, under the new Statutes, saw Julie Rosicky (Executive Director, ISS USA) elected as Chair of the PAC (known informally as the “Leader of the PAC”; congratulations Julie!) and the

following persons elected to the Governing Board: Doug Lewis (CFAB, formerly ISS UK), Maria Mabetoa (ISS South Africa), Dick Chamney (ISS Canada) and CP Ho (ISS Hong Kong). The first meeting of the Governing Board appointed Doug Lewis to the role of Interim Chair, pending appointment of an independent International President (several candidates are now under consideration).

The mood of the International Council meeting was, by consensus, one of energy and optimism, and this coupled with the introduction of a new and more streamlined set of Statutes for ISS was a hopeful sign at a time when the network is facing significant challenges. ISS Australia is hopeful these positive developments can continue as the new network bodies elected in May set to work on a range of tasks and problems, not least of which is the matter of strengthening and developing the ISS network around the world.

Immediately following the International Council meeting in Geneva, I attended a Regional Meeting of ISS members in Tokyo, generously hosted by ISS Japan and organised with the invaluable assistance of ISS Hong Kong. This meeting was important in allowing discussion of matters of interest to the ISS network in the Asia-Pacific region and development of a regional perspective on key issues affecting the network worldwide. Tentative plans were also made for network development initiatives in South and South East Asia and in the Pacific, where ISS Australia hopes to be able to play a leadership role.

3. International Missing Persons Day

The Coordinator of ISS Australia's International Parental Child Abduction Service, Helen Freris, reports on the recent launch of International Missing Children's Day.

On 25 May this year, ISS Australia was pleased to attend an event marking International Missing Children's Day 2010. Held at the National Museum in Canberra and jointly hosted by the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department and Australian Federal Police, the theme of this



year's event was international parental child abduction (IPCA). The launch brought together representatives of government, the Australian Federal Police, professional organisations and families with a concern for missing or abducted children. Notable speakers on the day were the Commonwealth Attorney-General, Hon Robert McClelland MP, the Minister for Home Affairs, Hon Brendan O'Connor MP, and a parent affected by IPCA.



While the Attorney-General and the Minister for Home Affairs spoke about the various strategies and initiatives implemented by Australia to prevent IPCA and to recover internationally abducted children, the parent representative spoke movingly of his grief due to the unexpected loss of daily contact with his children, and his journey in attempting to locate them.

The audience also heard from an AFP representative about the Global Missing Children's Network, a coalition of nine countries made up of Australia, Canada, Brazil, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Romania, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. This network has been formed to work together to raise awareness of IPCA and to share information and assist in the return of children who become missing due to abduction by a parent.



A range of materials to facilitate this awareness raising and support to left-behind parents was launched on the day. ISS Australia's input and feedback was sought in the development of posters promoting International Missing Children's Day and depicting the harmful effects of IPCA. A website accompanying these posters:

www.helpbringthemhome.org.au provides parents and other community members with information about IPCA and tools enabling parents to post photographs and other information about their missing children. Visitors to the website who know of the whereabouts of any child whose details are posted on the website are encouraged to alert the relevant authorities and thus help to reunite parents and their missing children.

ISS Australia greatly values our collaboration with the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department and the Australian Federal Police. We look forward to working jointly with them to continue raising awareness and preventing IPCA.

4. Case Study: Matthew's children found

Provided by an IPCA Caseworker, ISS Australia (National Office)

Matthew* had contact with ISS Australia after his three children were taken overseas by their mother, Sarah. Due to limited information about the children's whereabouts, ISS Australia used its international network in several countries to find and initiate contact with Sarah.

One of these ISS network members found and contacted Sarah. The Social Worker confirmed that the children were safe and well. ISS Australia passed this information on to Matthew, who was incredibly relieved to learn this. ISS Australia and the overseas ISS worker communicated with and between the parents for several months, supporting their needs and negotiating with them. There was an agreement by both parents to engage in mediation and a referral was completed to an appropriate mediation service.

ISS Australia supported Matthew through this process by initiating contact with the ISS International Network, finding Sarah and Matthew's children, and providing emotional support and completing referrals to relevant support services.

Both parents engaged in the mediation process and this resulted in an agreement for phone contact and exchange of photos between Matthew and his children.

Recently these arrangements have not been maintained as contact needs have changed. Both parents are again looking to re-engage in the mediation process in order to make more appropriate contact arrangements.

ISS Australia continues to support Mathew.

* All identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of ISS Australia's clients.

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: International Parental Child Abduction News Flash: *Baby just found!* :
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5. 2010 Joint World Conference on Social Work and Social Development

In June, the 2010 Joint World Conference on Social Work and Social Development was held in Hong Kong. In line with the collaborative spirit of the conference, staff from the ISS branches of Hong Kong, USA, United Kingdom, Switzerland and Australia made a joint presentation. Their topic was *Children and Families Separated Across Borders: Service Delivery Models and Advocacy for Change*.

Carmel Alakus represented ISS Australia and focused on kinship care across borders, taking into account current obstacles from government departments, legal delays and immigration requirements. Some suggestions supporting the best interests of the child were also explored. Carmel's report on the Conference will be provided for the following edition of ISS Australia's newsletter.

6. Quarterly Prize Draw

ISS Australia appreciates contributions from all its members. Their valuable support enables us to continue defending children and connecting families across the world. In appreciation and thanks for this support, in 2010 we have started a **quarterly prize draw**. This quarter's lucky winner is *Professor John Lawrence!*

Thank you for your ongoing interest, commitment and support John! Your prize is currently being posted to you.

Would you like to become a member?

Members receive this quarterly newsletter, go into a quarterly prize draw, have the right to vote at ISS Australia's AGM and stand for election to the Board, and have input into the organisation's future directions.



Call ISS Australia today on 1300 657 843!



International Social Service Australia...

International Social Service Australia is an independent charity and as such relies on donations to ensure critical services *defending children, and connecting families across the world* continue. If you would like to find out more or donate please call us today!

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