

## **AN OPEN LETTER TO SECRETARY CLINTON**

May 24, 2011

Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton  
Secretary of State  
US Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Madam Secretary,

We, the undersigned, appeal to you for help as left-behind parents of 115 American children who have been abducted and remain unlawfully retained in 25 countries. We also represent a number of U.S. servicemembers whose children were abducted while serving our country overseas. Some of these countries are signatories to the Hague Convention while others are not, such as Japan, where we face overwhelming odds trying to reunite with our children. We and our families are devastated – emotionally and financially – by the loss of our children and seek your assistance in ensuring that the U.S. Government is exercising all lawful means necessary to return these American children to their home country and reunite them with us.

The continued retention of our children violates international law, ethical norms, and human decency. Put simply, our children have been stolen from us, and it is our legal and moral right to be a part of their lives. As our 84 cases demonstrate, there are a growing number of countries willfully ignoring or abusing their international obligations with regard to international parental child abduction. Each of us has had exasperating experiences seeking justice in foreign courts, where our cases are often treated as custody matters, rather than as abduction cases. Often times, victim parents are told to use the court system of the foreign country when it is well known that such action will likely result in a decision with custody of our abducted children being awarded to the abducting party.

Collectively, we have limited or no contact with our children, many of whom have been turned against us as a result of parental alienation, a documented form of child abuse. Our children lost half their identities when they were ripped from their homes, families and friends. Like us parents, our children's grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and other family members have holes in their hearts left by the abduction of their loved ones.

We were encouraged by your July 2010 appointment of Ambassador Jacobs as Special Advisor to the Office of Children's Issues (OCI). However, in working with OCI, we have experienced little improvement in the quality of service provided by the Department of State and almost no positive results. The current system has failed us. While our children remain unlawfully in foreign lands, the number of new child abduction cases from the U.S. continues to grow at an alarming rate. There is an urgent need for change, not only to prevent more of our nation's children from being abducted across international borders, but also to effectuate the expeditious and safe return of our abducted children.

International child abduction is a serious human rights violation in desperate need of your attention. In our experience, all too often these international child abduction cases do not appear to be addressed aggressively because of the State Department's effort to maintain harmonious, bilateral relations with other countries or to pursue other compelling foreign policy goals. The Department's Foreign Affairs Manual on the issue of child abduction highlights this point by instructing OCI case workers to remain "neutral" when handling these abduction cases. This inherent conflict of interest cannot be ignored and we need to place a higher priority on the welfare of our children. We understand the necessity of maintaining strong relationships with other nations, but this should not come at the expense of our children.

Over the years, both houses of Congress have held numerous hearings on the issue of international parental child abduction, yet precious little has changed as our absent children grow older. On Tuesday, another group of parents will gather in Washington, D.C. for yet another hearing. It is our hope that this will be the year that Congress and the Administration unite to pass new laws to strengthen our nation's capacity to help the parent and children victims of international parental child abduction. We also hope that the State Department, under your leadership, will embrace these changes to finally end this gross injustice affecting thousands of American children.

Madam Secretary, we applaud your past efforts and record on children's rights issues, but we are desperate and plead for your assistance. It is long past time for this great country to show leadership on the issue of international parental child abduction. We cannot grow complacent with each successful return, nor can we forget about all the other children who are being wrongfully retained abroad. We are fortunate to have the strong support of groups which advocate for victims of international parental child abduction. However, we need our government's unwavering support and determination to bring our children home.

Madam Secretary, we would welcome the opportunity to meet with you directly to discuss how progress can be made. Please help us to be reunited with our children.

Sincerely,

**David Brian Thomas**, father of Graham Hajime Thomas (Nishizawa) (Age 20)

Abducted to Japan in November, 1992

**Walter Benda**, father of M.B and E.B (Ages 22 and 20)

Abducted to Japan in July, 1995

**Charles A. Hamilton**, father of Dakota Carmen (age 15)

Abducted to Spain in December, 1996

**Eric Kalmus**, father of Amy Ito (Kalmus), (age 14)

Abducted to Japan in 1998

**James Filmer**, father of Sarah (age 13)

Abducted to Germany in October, 1998

**David Hendricks**, father of Daniel and Patrick (ages 17 and 13)

Abducted to Norway in June, 1999

**Mark & Lydia Harrison**, father and grandmother of Jessica Danielle (age 15)

Abducted to Mexico in July, 2000

**Craig Alciati**, father of Peter Spencer (age 12)

Abducted to France in March, 2001

**Michael C. Gulbraa**, father of Michael K. & Christopher R. Gulbraa (ages 21 and 20)

Abducted to Japan in November, 2001

**CDR Paul Toland, USN and Linda Toland**, father / sole surviving parent and stepmother of Erika (age 8)  
Abducted to Japan in July, 2003

**Richard B Kephart Jr and Martha Kephart**, father and grandmother of Richard Kephart III and Nicolle Hyler Kephart (ages 15 and 10)  
Abducted to Japan in November, 2003

**Brett Weed**, father of Takoda Tei Weed & Tiana Kiku Weed (ages 13 and 10)  
Abducted to Japan in January, 2004

**Klaus Zensen**, father of Maria Carolina (age 7)  
Abducted to Brazil in July, 2004

**Ariel Ayubo**, father of Lorenzo (age 10)  
Abducted to Brazil in September, 2004

**Robert A. McConnell**, father of Bianca Damanik (age 8)  
Abducted to Indonesia in January, 2005

**Deana Hebert**, mother of Bianca Lozano (age 17)  
Abducted to Mexico in April, 2005

**Paul Brown**, father of Liam Shiratori Paul Brown (age 8)  
Abducted to Japan in June, 2005

**William J Lake**, father of Mary Victoria Lake (age 14)  
Abducted to Japan in August, 2005

**Stephen Christie**, father of James Kento Christie (age 16)  
Abducted to Japan in October, 2005

**John Donaldson**, father of Michiru Janice Donaldson (age 10)  
Abducted to Japan in November, 2005

**George A. Petroutsas**, father of Andonios (age 6)  
Abducted to Greece in December, 2005, re-abducted in June, 2010

**Michele Swensen**, mother of Amina, Layla, and Sami (ages 14, 12 and 10)  
Abducted to Yemen in February, 2006

**Didier Combe**, father of Chloe (age 7)  
Abducted to Mexico in March, 2006

**Kelvin Birotte**, father of Kelvin Jr. (age 5)  
Abducted to Brazil in July, 2006

**Timothy Weinstein**, father of Paul and Anna (ages 13 and 10)  
Abducted to Brazil in August, 2006

**Marty Pate**, father of Nicole (age 10)  
Abducted to Brazil in August, 2006

**Nigel Lewis**, father of Jasmyn Lewis and Cody Lewis (ages 9 and 7)  
Abducted to Japan in November, 2006

**Donna Hesse**, grandmother of Kai Noel Hachiya (age 12)  
Abducted to Japan in December, 2006

**Michael McCarty**, father of Liam Gabriele (age 9)  
Abducted to Italy in March, 2007

**Douglas Brian Gessleman**, father of David and Joshua Gessleman (ages 7 and 9)  
Abducted to Japan in May, 2007

**Robert Carpenter**, father of Natalie Elisabeth and Krystal Lynn (age 5)  
Abducted to Colombia in June, 2007

**Trevor Richardson**, father of Andrew (age 5)  
Abducted to Mexico in August, 2007

**Paul Wong**, father and sole surviving parent of Kaya Summer Xiao-Lian Wong (age 7)  
Abducted to Japan in August, 2007

**Kirsten M. Snipp**, mother of Joichiro Yamada (age 13)  
Abducted to Japan in September, 2007

**Michael G. Canopin**, father of Christian Lehua Haolalani Yuuki Inamura-Canopin (age 13)  
Abducted to Japan in October, 2007

**Jose Maria Cacho Polo**, father of Jose Martín (age 11)  
Abducted to Japan in January, 2008

**Michael Sanchez**, father of Emily Machado (age 5)  
Abducted to Brazil in March, 2008

**Randy Ernst**, father of Joseph and Nicole (ages 13 and 11)  
Abducted to Russia in May, 2008

**Sean A. McKnight**, father of Kelly and Julia (ages 15 and 7)  
Abducted to Poland in May, 2008

**Randy Collins**, father of Keisuke Christian Collins (age 8)  
Abducted to Japan in June, 2008

**Carlos Bermudez**, father of Sage Antonio (age 4)  
Abducted to Mexico in June, 2008

**Bandi J. Rao**, father of Anand Saisuday (age 6)  
Abducted to India in July, 2008

**Carl Hillman**, father of Sean (age 8)  
Abducted to Japan in July, 2008

**Conrad Washington**, father of Conisha Kanna and Maximus Riku (ages 16 and 7)  
Abducted to Japan in July, 2008

**Patrick McCoy**, father of Yuuki McCoy (Kojima) (age 3)  
Abducted to Japan in August, 2008

**Regan Haight**, mother of Chloe and Aiden Kobayashi (ages 9 and 5)  
Abducted to Japan in September, 2008

**James Robert Allen**, father of Joseph Martin (age 2)  
Abducted to Colombia in September, 2008

**Brandon C. Neal**, father of Alexander Hikaru Neal (Sugashima) (age 4)  
Abducted to Japan in September, 2008

**Chandrashekar Mungaravalli Puttappa**, father of Akshara (age 3)  
Abducted to India in October, 2008

**Michael Elias, Nancy Elias and Miguel Elias**, father, grandmother and grandfather to Jade Maki Elias and Michael Angel Elias (ages 5 and 3)  
Abducted to Japan in December, 2008

**Jessie Duke, Roy Duke and Deborah Duke**, father, grandfather and grandmother of Shanonyuma Ishida and Rikki (ages 8 and 4)  
Abducted to Japan in December, 2008

**Matt Wyman**, father of Jake Taylor and Alex Michael (ages 10 and 6)  
Abducted to Japan in January, 2009

**Roy Koyama**, father of Emily Alina (age 2)  
Abducted to Costa Rica in February, 2009

**Devon Davenport**, father of Nadia Lynn (age 2)  
Abducted to Brazil in February, 2009

**John Henry Richardson III**, father of Matthew and Dylan (age 8 and 7)  
Abducted to Mexico in April, 2009

**Dhanika Athukorala**, father of Kali Soleil (age 3)  
Abducted to Dominican Republic in April, 2009

**Richard C. Nielsen, Peter Nielsen and Karin Heintz**, father, grandfather and grandmother of Leo Nielsen (age 4)  
Abducted to Japan in April, 2009

**Darshaun Nadeau**, father of Kaya Nadeau (age 2)  
Abducted to Japan in May, 2009

**Mzimaz Youssef**, father of Ghali (age 2)  
Abducted to Morocco in May, 2009

**James Patrick Carol, Jr.**, father of Andrea Vanessa and James Patrick (ages 7 and 6)  
Abducted to Mexico in June, 2009

**Tracy Baumgart**, mother of Saxon Rayne Kavar (age 10)  
Abducted to Jordan in July, 2009

**Michael M. Bergeron**, father of Ami Amor (age 6)  
Abducted to Peru in August, 2009

**Douglass Berg**, father of Gunnar and Kianna Berg (ages 11 and 10)  
Abducted to Japan in August, 2009

**Christopher and Amy Savoie**, father and stepmother of Isaac and Rebecca (ages 10 and 8)  
Abducted to Japan in August, 2009

**Colin Bower**, father of Noor and Ramsay (ages 10 and 8)  
Abducted to Egypt in August, 2009

**Evangelina Pena**, mother of Elias Badys (age 4)  
Abducted to Morocco in September, 2009

**Brett Purcell**, father of Dante (age 1)  
Abducted to Argentina in September, 2009

**Bruce R. Gherbetti**, father of Rion Suzuki, Lauren Gherbetti and Julia Gherbetti (ages 8, 6 and 4)  
Abducted to Japan in September, 2009

**Mark Gomez**, father of Haydn (age 3)  
Abducted to China in January, 2010

**Jeffery Morehouse, Madeline Morehouse & David Sorlie**, father, grandmother and grandfather of "Mochi" Atomu Imoto Morehouse (age 7)  
Abducted to Japan in February, 2010

**Stan Hunkovic**, father of Gabriel Julius and Anastasia Sierra-Marie (ages 3 and 1)  
Abducted to Trinidad & Tobago in February, 2010

**Sara Edwards**, mother of Eli Kiraz (age 3)  
Abducted to Turkey in March, 2010

**Alex Kahney**, father of Selene and Cale (ages 9 and 7)  
Abducted to Japan in April, 2010

**Brian Prager and Morton Prager**, father and grandfather of Louis “Rui” (age 5)  
Abducted to Japan in June, 2010

**Antonio Quintana**, father of Victoria and Virginia (ages 4 and 3)  
Abducted to Argentina in July, 2010

**Rex S. Arul**, father of Rhea Immaculate (age 4)  
Abducted to India in July, 2010

**Simon Williams**, father of Noan John (age 2)  
Abducted to Brazil in August, 2010

**Sheena Howard**, mother of Talan and José Otavio Ribeiro da Silva (ages 5 and 2)  
Abducted to Brazil in September, 2010

**Dennis Patrick Burns**, father of Victoria Emma and Sophia Marie (ages 4 and 2)  
Abducted to Argentina in September, 2010

**Richard Joseph Gatt**, father of Natasha Joanie (age 6)  
Abducted to Brazil in October, 2010

**Douglas Trombino**, father of Morgana Gray (age 2)  
Abducted to Colombia in November, 2010

**Ray Rose**, father of Kaia (age 15 months)  
Abducted to Japan in November, 2010

**Robert W. Makielski**, father of Isabel Marie and Gabriel Leonardo (ages 8 and 4)  
Abducted to Dominican Republic in January, 2011

**Tim Johnston**, father of Kai Endo (age 6)  
Abducted to Japan in March, 2011