Paraguay Acts To Halt "illegal Baby Trafficking"

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by John Neagle

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On Aug. 31, Paraguay's Supreme Court suspended the adoptions of babies by foreigners. Court President Jose Alberto Correa said adoptions in process may be completed. President Andres Rodriguez asserted publicly on Aug. 17 that "infants are being sold for $7,000 and incredibly, judges and lawyers are involved in this business...It is a shame that Paraguayan children are negotiated over like merchandise." Newspapers published stories involving poor women who said they felt pressured to give up their children. Reports also appeared of foreigners allegedly paying large sums for healthy babies with blond hair and blue eyes. Judges subsequently became reluctant to hand down final authorization that would allow Paraguayan infants to leave the country with adoptive parents. Until recently, adoptions by foreign families were relatively easy and fast. Adoptions by US families went from 37 in 1985 to 322 in 1988. In a telephone interview with AP, a US embassy official who requested anonymity, said about 220 adoptions are pending. Under existing regulations, preference was given to Paraguayans seeking to adopt and foreign families had to submit eight reports during the first two years to document their child's progress. The maximum age of an adoptive parent was 60 instead of 45, as is the limit in many US states, and there were fewer obstacles to adoptions by single parents. Most US applications included an approval from a US adoption agency or social worker, and a visa from the Immigration and Naturalization Service that permitted the child to enter the US. On Sept. 4, government officials in Asuncion said police discovered 26 infants presumably being prepared for sale abroad in a series of weekend raids. The children were found at two sites in the capital. Although persons in charge of caring for the babies said their papers were in order, unofficial unidentified sources cited by AFP said the babies were being prepared for sale at $8,000 to $10,000 each on the foreign black market. (Basic data from AP, 08/31/89; AFP, 09/04/89)

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