

**Opening Statement of Senator Chuck Grassley of Iowa
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee
Hearing on “National Adoption Month: Stories of Success and
Meeting the Challenges of International Adoptions”
Wednesday, November 18, 2015**

The family is the foundation of American society. For millions of Americans, the season of Thanksgiving gives us an opportunity to count our blessings and give thanks for hearth and home. The safety, stability and security of a permanent, loving home reinforces a strong foundation of support to last a lifetime.

But not every child gets to experience these benefits. Millions of children around the world are orphans, without parents or a family to support them. Not only do they lack families, many are subjected to life in subpar state orphanage systems hazarding their health and development. They will never know what it is like to have a loving family, sibling rivalry, or the confidence that comes with family support.

Despite the efforts of host countries to find extended family members or domestic adoptions for their children, there are still thousands of children who need help. Next Thursday, approximately 6,000 children from around the world will celebrate Thanksgiving in America for the first time. This month, they will experience all the bounty and opportunity America has to offer, in addition to the permanence of a new family.

Today, in the spirit of National Adoption Month, we want to celebrate American families who have opened their hearts and homes to children around the world. America leads the world in foreign adoptions. Not long ago in 2004, our families welcomed over twenty thousand foreign children into their homes.

As every parent knows, raising children is hard work. Today, we can reflect on the incredible rewards of our continuing efforts to reform and improve the adoption process. We will get to hear from families how adoption has changed their lives and the lives of their children. It is a great privilege to see that our efforts to overcome barriers to adoption have such direct and lasting impact on the people we serve.

We'll hear from an Iowan today who has had an immeasurable impact on children at home and abroad. Dr. Rick Wilkerson has adopted three foster kids, a fourth child from Cambodia and a fifth one from Haiti. After visiting Haiti, Dr. Wilkerson started a non-profit organization dedicated to giving back and supporting orphans in that country.

Yet, despite the successes and the positive impacts, there are also challenges. There have been barriers for some families as countries face internal conflicts and struggles. Today, we'll hear the heartbreak of one adoption that was disrupted because of Russia's suspension of international adoptions.

We'll also hear about the struggles that over 400 families are currently facing in bringing home children from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Families are rightly confused and

frustrated with the situation in the Congo. Their adoptions have been finalized by the home country as well as the United States. Yet, despite the fact that the parents must provide financially and emotionally for their children who are physically in the Congo, they cannot bring them home. They love these children. They are committed to protecting them, providing for them, and bringing them home. But, their hands are tied until the Congo resolves their internal issues and moves forward.

I want to welcome Assistant Secretary Bond today to give the perspective of the Department of State. I hope we'll hear how our diplomatic corps is working with Russia, the Congo and other countries where international adoptions are stalled. Assistant Secretary Bond will also shed light on the strategies the State Department is undertaking to improve the adoption process and be an advocate for children and families.

Strong families make America strong. That's why public policies that promote strong families rest squarely in the national interest. Permanent, loving homes equip the next generation with the tools for self-sufficiency, to go out and succeed in the workforce, volunteer in service to others, join the ranks of the military or pursue public service. Although it can't guarantee happiness and prosperity, the prospects of raising the next generation to embrace the rights and responsibilities of citizenship are much brighter for children who are able to count a forever family among their year-round blessings at the Thanksgiving table.