Ethiopian orphanage used ‘child harvesters’ to find children [1]

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DanAdopt’s closed orphanage used an intermediary to convince families to put their children up for adoption

Adoptions from the Enat Alem orphanage in Ethiopia were recently halted by the social and integration minister [8], Karen Hækkerup (Socialdemokraterne), based on reports of children being deprived of food, basic care and medical treatment at the facility. Now new reports have surfaced that the home used ‘child harvesters’ to lure local families into putting their children up for adoption at Enat Alem in violation of the Hague Conventions.

A local man, Gimma Kebele, told the DR News programme '21 Søndag' that he worked at Enat Alem and that, along with his duties as a night watchman, he went around local villages visiting families in an attempt to persuade them to put their children up for adoption. Kebele says that he has been involved in 145 adoptions at Enat Alem.

According to local authorities, Kebele received a reward for collecting the children that was quite lucrative by Ethiopian standards. He was allegedly paid between 75 and 110 Danish kroner for each child he brought to the home. By comparison, his monthly salary as a guard at the orphanage was about 150 kroner.

A local official said that many parents who were seeking a chance at a better life for their children never fully understood that they would most likely never see them again after agreeing to an adoption through Enat Alem.

“They did not know what the separation meant because they were pressured and tricked and promised many things,” the official told '21 Søndag'. Other sources have said that biological parents were told that their children would receive excellent educations and then be sent back to Ethiopia to help their biological families.

"I am completely shaken," Steen Andersen, the general secretary of UNICEF Denmark, told '21 Søndag'. "This is unethical and illegal. These children are not orphans, and many of these women believe that their children are going on an extended holiday in Denmark."

Records show that 21 children have come to Denmark from Enat Alem via DanAdopt since 2009. The agency said that it had no knowledge that the orphanage used child harvesters. This past weekend, DanAdopt sent a letter to the parents on the waiting list for Ethiopian children in Denmark, saying that the moratorium on adoptions from Ethiopia was "temporary". The letter goes on to say that there have been no problems with Danish adoptions from Ethiopia since 2009 and that they had not been allowed to see '21 Søndag' before it was aired in order to verify its claims.

Kebele denied that he was paid to find children for adoption and said that he was simply doing outreach work in order to assist poor families. Soliciting children for adoption for profit is punishable by imprisonment in Ethiopia.

The letter from DanAdopt to parents waiting for a child from Ethiopia is here [9], in Danish.