



## South Korea Recognises Systematic Human Rights Violations in International Adoptions

**Extensive violations of human rights uncovered in South Korea's international adoption practices: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission demands a formal state apology and groundbreaking reforms to restore adoptees' lost identities and rights.**

In a landmark decision, South Korea's Truth and Reconciliation Commission has determined that the nation's international adoption practices resulted in serious human rights abuses impacting thousands of adoptees. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission highlights that the state's prioritisation of international adoption over developing domestic child welfare led to systematic falsifications and identity theft, leaving adoptees with no access to information about their origins.

*"The Commission's findings confirm our longstanding suspicions of widespread falsifications and manipulation in the adoption processes. This revelation compels both the Korean state, receiving countries, and adoption agencies to take responsibility and address the severe violations of human rights and laws endured by adoptees for decades,"* said Peter Møller, co-founder and leader of the Danish Korean Rights Group.

Through a comprehensive two-year investigation, the Commission documented how children were falsely registered as orphans or given fraudulent identities before being sent to foreign families. The state delegated the entire adoption process to private agencies without sufficient oversight, enabling extensive violations of both South Korean constitutional law and international conventions.

The Commission's recommendations include a formal apology from the state, an inquiry into adoptees' citizenship statuses, and compensation for victims of identity falsifications. Furthermore, the Commission urges the swift ratification of the Hague Convention to ensure the future protection of children in adoption processes.

This decision represents a crucial turning point in South Korea's history, calling on the state to take responsibility and restore the rights of the children who were sent abroad.



## Recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has concluded that the long-standing practices surrounding international adoptions neglected the state's duty to protect fundamental constitutional principles and international human rights. Consequently, the Commission has made the following recommendations:

- A formal apology from the state.
- Investigation into adoptees' citizenship statuses and implementation of measures ensuring their legal recognition as citizens.
- Compensation and other support for victims of identity falsifications.
- Improvements to the systems granting access to adoption records.
- Substantial support measures for reunions between adoptees and their biological families.
- Swift ratification of the Hague Convention on International Adoption.
- Actions by adoption agencies to restore the rights of adoptees.

*"The work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission brings hope to adoptees across the globe and sets a new benchmark for accountability and human rights. Today is a day for celebration, but it is also the start of a larger effort. The Commission's work marks the beginning of changes Danish adoptees initiated three years ago,"* says Peter Møller.

He added: *"This is a historic day where we finally witness the start of a process that will grant adoptees access to the truth about their origins. The Korean state must act decisively to implement these critical recommendations and ensure the prompt restoration of adoptees' lost identities and rights."*

### **"The serpent in paradise"**

Although this is a day of celebration, recent rumours have given rise to serious concern.

Reports suggesting that the adoption agency Holt and the Korean Ministry of Health and Welfare are attempting to withhold or destroy documents required for submission to the state are deeply troubling, and we hope that these reports are just false rumours.

Such actions would not only constitute a violation of the law but also obstruct adoptees' efforts to uncover the truth about their backgrounds. This would directly contravene the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The Danish Korean Rights Group regards this as a serious assault on transparency and accountability that the Commission has worked to establish.



The Commission's statements clearly underscores the grave violations of both South Korean and international laws committed by adoption agencies such as Holt. The Danish Korean Rights Group strongly urges Holt and other agencies involved to immediately comply with the Commission's recommendations and South Korean law.

It is their legal and ethical duty to fully cooperate with Korean authorities and adhere to the international laws that were found to have been breached—laws that are designed to safeguard adoptees and their rights. The futures of many adoptees depend on these agencies acting transparently and responsibly from now on.

This underscores the urgency for the Korean state to act swiftly to implement these crucial recommendations, ensuring that the adoptees' lost identity and rights are restored, and that documents pertaining to the adoptees are not lost forever.

### **Final Conclusions of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission**

The South Korean Commission's report outlines the preliminary findings regarding the first 56 individual adoption cases. The remaining approximately 300 cases, along with the final report, are expected to be released by the end of April 2025.

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