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Book Review

Jaffe, Eliezer, D. (Editor) 1994, **Intercountry Adoptions: Laws and Perspectives of "Sending" Countries**, Gefen Publishing House, New York and Jerusalem

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This book is a strong call for the establishment of a legal, intercountry adoption service in Israel. Such a service does not exist at present, and thousands of Israeli couples who wish to adopt a child are forced to fend for themselves in the highly charged and very complicated international adoption scene. Since the establishment of the State, the National Adoption Service of the Social Welfare Ministry has been the sole agency functioning in the field of adoption in Israel. Since the field is fraught with complicated issues that are fateful in the lives of children and families, it is, of course, imperative that the agencies involved in adoption be highly professional in their approach. However, according to Prof. Jaffe, such professionalism need not exclude a concern for those couples who have problems of fertility, and who are anxious to fulfill their parenting need by providing a permanent home for a child in need of such a home.

According to law and to the moral sanction of the society, the child welfare department of Israel's Social Welfare Ministry has an obligation to work for the welfare of those children whose parents are unable to provide for their welfare without help. In extreme situations, when the child's family either surrenders the child permanently, or is found to be incompetent, the child can be placed permanently in an adoptive home. Each year, between 75 and 100 children are placed in Israeli adoptive homes by the national Adoption Service, which is a highly professional agency within the child welfare branch of the Social Welfare Ministry. On the whole, although there are occasional blunders, within the narrow confines of the Service definition, the Service functions well and, with the absorption of research advancements from the social sciences and child development, according to international standards of adoption procedures. However, there is a question which is being powerfully raised in this new book edited by Prof. Eliezer D. Jaffe. Does the state have a moral obligation to help infertile couples who want to adopt a child?

According to Prof. Jaffe, who provides the reader with the necessary demographical information in the book's outspoken introduction, there are far more infertile couples in Israel who are anxious to adopt a child, than there are children who are available for adoption. At present, a couple must wait up to six years after applying for adoption, and since the age limit for an adoptive father is forty, and an adoptive mother is 35, many couples will be automatically ineligible if they apply even in their early thirties. Since there is no way for all the infertile couples in Israel who would like to adopt a child, to find eligible

children in Israel for adoption, Jaffe claims that it is the moral responsibility of the professional community to provide these couples with intercountry services.

This book is a result of a year's study carried out by Prof. Jaffe with the backing of the Israel Intercountry Adoption Project, and a grant from the Rothschild Foundation. Prof. Jaffe made contact with intercountry adoption agencies around the world, in an attempt to develop a model upon which to create an Israeli adoption agency according to international standards. He discovered that there is not enough professional literature on international adoption, and that all the existing literature has been written from the perspective of professionals in the countries where the children are absorbed, not from those in countries which "supply" the children.

This is the first book that is dedicated to a presentation of the "sender" country's point of view. That is a significant service provided by the book, and an important step towards the provision of aid and guidance for couples seeking to adopt internationally. The "sender" countries represented in the book are: India, Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine, Brazil, Costa Rica, Argentina, Chile, Peru and Ecuador. Each chapter is written by a local professional who explains the historical perspective in his/her country with regard to adoption, the legal imperatives and the specific procedures which need to be undertaken. At the end of each chapter there is a list of recognized agencies that can be contacted in order to begin adoption proceedings in that country.

In addition to a bold, unequivocal presentation of the need for an Israeli Intercountry Adoption Service, and a selection of important information about the historical and procedural issues in 12 "sender" countries, one can find in Prof. Jaffe's book a third important contribution. The book includes the text of the Hague Conference Private International Law pertaining to International Adoption signed by 69 countries, including Israel, in May, 1993. This law formally affirms the status of intercountry adoption and establishes a system of international laws to protect the best interests of children who are adopted outside their country of birth. According to this new law, the State may provide accreditation to a nongovernmental, nonprofit agency if all adoption procedures in that country are carried on by one central State authority. Since a new Adoption Law has been presented to the Knesset, and there is considerable interest in its passage from a broad consensus of Knesset factions, it is quite possible that Prof. Jaffe's campaign to create a professional Intercountry Adoption Service in Israel may succeed in the near future. Whether it does succeed or not, the book is an invaluable source of information for any couple seeking to adopt a child from another country.