

יום 03.03.97

New adoption law nears implementation

By ESTHER HECHT

Amid reports of illegal trafficking in babies and Romania's abrupt halt to foreign adoptions, a new law regulating international adoptions came into effect here yesterday.

The catch is that the Justice Ministry and Social Affairs Ministry, which were to have formulated regulations so the law could be implemented, have not completed their work.

Only 70 to 80 Israeli babies are available for adoption each year and the wait for a baby is more than six years. Often, by the time a couple's turn comes up, they are too old to meet the requirements of the Social Affairs Ministry's Adoption Service, until now the only Israeli agency empowered to handle adoptions. For these and other reasons, thousands of Israelis have sought babies abroad, sometimes paying as much as \$30,000.

The new law, passed last May during the last session of the 13th Knesset, empowers professional nonprofit agencies to handle inter-

national adoptions and allows them to charge only reasonable fees. In this, the law follows the American model, according to which only nongovernment agencies handle adoptions, said Prof. Eliezer Jaffe of the Hebrew University's Baerwald School of Social Work, an expert on international adoptions and a prime mover of the new law.

"It's a disgrace the regulations are not ready on the date designated by the Knesset, 10 months after the law was passed," Jaffe said. "It shows contempt for the Knesset and for the families who have been waiting for this. Until the professional agencies are licensed — and they can't be licensed without the regulations — people who want to adopt are on their own."

The regulations were to have been completed by September 1996, but the ministries sought and received a six-month extension. Yesterday, the Justice Ministry blamed the delay on the Social Affairs Ministry, while that ministry insisted, "We're moving along with the utmost speed."