



that even though his son is back, he does not want other parents to go through what he did.

The point of having a special post of Ambassador-at-Large would be for that person to devote him/herself exclusively to child abduction cases. Currently, that's the job of the U.S. State Department and the results are not always good. As Goldman knows all too well, the issues that ambassadors to particular countries understand and deal with seldom include child abduction. Worse, as we've learned in articles dealing with abductions to Mexico, the interests of the United States abroad and those of parents with abducted children often conflict. Predictably, the larger issues tend to get more attention than individual cases of abducted children.

Our relationship with Mexico is a particularly good example of the phenomenon. Immigration, trade and illegal drug issues take precedence for the United States and our ambassador in Mexico City may be hesitant to push the country to comply with the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction if doing so might compromise the country's broader agenda.

Goldman said that while U.S. ambassadors to individual countries can work on these cases, he said that with economic and defense issues at the top of most bilateral agendas, child custody is not a priority. Ambassadors at large have been used by the State Department since the Truman Administration to have an official focused on diplomacy regarding specific issues. Current ambassadors at large include those for war crimes and women's issues. The Obama Administration also has created special envoys to focus on issues including labor affairs, human trafficking and disability.

"The kids are at the bottom of their ladder," Goldman said of ambassadors' priorities.

Some may consider it ironic – others the very opposite – that the call to bypass regular State Department channels comes when the secretary is Hilary Clinton. Clinton after all has spoken and written at length about the value of families from her days as a Yale undergraduate through her time as First Lady during which she published the book “It Takes a Village.” Indeed, she was instrumental in the research on Goldstein, Solnit and Freud’s “Beyond the Best Interests of the Child,” the book that, far more than any other, is responsible for family court policies and practices separating fathers from their children.

Beyond the Ambassador-at-Large idea, Goldman has other ideas on how to improve U.S. response to international child abduction.

Among the proposals Goldman is pushing for is automatic notification of impacted members of Congress when the State Department is notified of an international child custody dispute. He said Smith's work on the issue was helpful in his case and members of Congress can help push trade and foreign aid sanctions against countries in violation of the Hague treaties.

If you can attend the hearing this coming Tuesday, by all means do.

Thanks to Marcy for the heads-up.

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