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'We Haven't Forgotten You,' U.S. Parents Tell Russian Orphans

By Jonathan Earle

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"We miss your smile every day, and we want you to know that we haven't forgotten about you," a group of Americans have written in an open letter to the Russian children they met but were hastily barred from adopting.

The letter, published in Moskovsky Komsomolets on Tuesday and signed by 55 prospective parents, contains both words of reassurance to the children and a heartfelt plea to President Vladimir Putin to reverse the Jan. 1 ban on U.S. adoptions.

"Please remember that we'll never stop loving you. We will continue to hope and pray that President Putin will find the means and the way to unite our families," they wrote.

Almost six months have passed since U.S. parents were banned from adopting Russian children, officially for safety reasons, though the move was widely seen as a hastily drafted response to the U.S. Magnitsky Act, which calls for sanctions against Russians suspected

of human rights abuses.

The ban was condemned by the human rights leaders and the U.S., which lobbied for Russia to exempt parents who had already met and bonded with their perspective child but not completed the legal process.

Tens of thousands of opponents of the ban attended a January march in Moscow, and more than 100,000 signed a petition against the bill, which rights advocates said would condemn thousands of orphans, many with disabilities, to grow up in often inadequate, state-run facilities.

About half of Russians support the adoptions ban, according to a January poll by the independent Levada Center. More than 20,000 attended a government-backed march "In Support of Children" in early March, the event's organizer said at the time.

A group of nearly 200 pediatricians and child psychologists signed an appeal to Putin last month, asking him to allow 100 children who had bonded with their would-be parents to move to the U.S. The Kremlin has said it could not comment on the letter because it had not received it officially.

Americans have adopted more than 60,000 in the past two decades, and at least 19 have died due to negligence and domestic abuse. Some backers of the bill, including the vocal children's ombudsman, also suggested that international adoption is unpatriotic and akin to human trafficking.

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