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Russia Opens Inquiry Into U.S. Child-Trafficking

By The Moscow Times

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Investigators in Russia have opened a criminal inquiry into human trafficking of adopted Russian children in the United States.

The Investigative Committee announced the case Thursday in response to reports that adopted children in the U.S. were being traded in underground networks on the Internet by parents who no longer wanted them. Some reportedly suffered sexual abuse.

Committee spokesman Vladimir Markin said that 26 adopted Russian children were believed to be among the victims, including Anna Barnes (Anna Faizzulina, born 1994), Inga Whatcott (Inga Kurasova, born 1985) and Dmitri Stewart, who was taken from Scotland and left with a couple in Chicago.

Inga was adopted from a Russian orphanage in 1997, aged 12, and taken to the U.S. by her new parents, Priscilla and Neal Whatcott. After less than a year, they turned to the Internet to find

her a new home, saying they were unable to cope with her behavior. Inga was placed with a number of different families, where she says she suffered physical and sexual abuse.

Konstantin Dolgov, special representative for human rights at Russia's Foreign Ministry, said that Moscow had notified Washington about the criminal inquiry and expected a prompt response.

"We have already passed information on the criminal case to the American side via our embassy in Washington," Dolgov said. "We demanded a thorough and unbiased investigation."

Neither the U.S. State Department nor the Justice Department provided immediate comment Thursday in response to inquiries about the Russian investigation.

Alexander Bastrykin, head of the Investigative Committee, wrote to U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder in November, requesting an inquiry into alleged violations of the rights of adopted Russian children uncovered in an investigation by the Reuters news agency and NBC television.

Reuters and NBC revealed the existence in September of an online market in which parents were handing over their unwanted adopted children to strangers they had met in Yahoo forums or via Facebook.

Some parents claimed they could no longer cope with emotional or behavioral problems suffered by the youngsters, most of whom had come from abroad.

The investigation identified cases of children who suffered severe abuse after being given to new parents. One 10-year-old boy was handed over in a motel parking lot to a man now serving a prison sentence for child pornography.

A law banning adoptions of Russian children by U.S. nationals was signed by President Vladimir Putin late last year and took effect in January.

The "Dima Yakovlev law" was named after a Russian boy aged 21 months who died of heatstroke in July 2008 in Virginia when his adoptive father, Miles Harrison, left him in the back of his car for nine hours after forgetting to take him to daycare. Harrison was acquitted of involuntary manslaughter.

The law provoked an international outcry because it was seen as retaliation for the adoption by the U.S. Congress of the Magnitsky Act in December 2012. The act created a blacklist of Russian officials for human rights abuses, linked to the death of the anti-corruption lawyer Sergei Magnitsky in a Moscow prison in 2009.

A survey by Russian polling agency VTsIOM showed in March that 64 percent of Russians were in favor of banning foreigners from adopting local children.

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