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U.S. Gay Couples Banned From Adopting Russian Children

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A new round of U.S.-Russian negotiations on child adoptions that started Wednesday in Moscow swiftly decided that same-sex U.S. couples would be banned from adopting Russian children.

Only heterosexual married couples will be permitted to adopt children, as Russia does not recognize same-sex marriages, said Alina Levitskaya, a senior official at the Education and Science Ministry, Interfax reported.

U.S. and Russian officials still must negotiate ways to monitor Russian children adopted by U.S. parents and the possible transfer of the children to new families if something goes wrong, Levitskaya said.

Negotiators expect to clear all remaining issues in the next two to three weeks, but an agreement on child adoptions will not be signed before November or December, Levitskaya

said.

Meanwhile, children's ombudsman Pavel Astakhov promised a new round of checks on state child welfare agencies. Agency officials found to have broken the law will "face responsibility, including criminal responsibility," Astakhov said in a statement.

He also called for checks of U.S. adoption agencies working in Russia and a reduction in their number.

Russian officials demanded the adoption agreement after a U.S. mother returned her 7-year-old adopted son to Russia unaccompanied on a plane in April. The mother said the boy was psychologically unfit and dangerous.

Russia also plans to negotiate adoption agreements with Britain, France, Germany, Israel, Spain and all other countries that adopt Russian children, Levitskaya said.

U.S. and Russian negotiators agreed at earlier talks that U.S. adoption agencies working in Russia would have to receive U.S. accreditation, which obliges them to comply with the international Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption. The convention has been ratified by the United States, but not Russia.

More than 40 U.S. adoption agencies have applied for U.S. accreditation, Levitskaya said.

From 1996 through March this year, 14 Russian children appear to have died at the hands of their adoptive U.S. parents, a spokesman for the Education and Science Ministry said by telephone Wednesday.

About 60,000 Russian children have been adopted by U.S. families since 1996, Astakhov said.

Some 120,000 Russian children are registered as orphans every year, a senior official with the ruling United Russia party said in May.

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