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## **Domestic vs. International Adoption: Are Celebrities Overlooking American Children?**

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### **FOX NEWS**

A judge rejected Madonna's bid to adopt a 3-year-old Malawian girl because the African nation's laws require prospective parents to live in the country for at least 18 months, the star's lawyer said Friday.

The process of adopting a child from Africa involves significant wait time, international scrutiny and significant cost. So it raises the question: Why doesn't Madonna — as well as many other celebrities who have gone abroad to adopt — look a little closer to home for her new family members?

Madonna's rep Liz Rosenberg said she first met the young girl she wants to adopt, named Mercy, on a visit last year, and the Material Girl been working toward adopting her ever since.

Stars including Sheryl Crow, Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman, Rosie O'Donnell and Calista Flockhart have all adopted domestically. But, in addition to Madonna, celebrities including Angelina Jolie, Mia Farrow, Julie Andrews and Meg Ryan have all adopted children from foreign countries. And while last year saw a slight decline, international adoptions overall have nearly tripled since 1992.

[PHOTOS: Click here to see celebrities who chose domestic adoption.](#)

And it's not like there is a lack of domestic supply.

According to the Dave Thomas Foundation, 129,000 American children are currently awaiting adoption. And while 79,000 children were approved for adoption last year, only 51,000 found homes through the foster care system, leaving 28,000 American children without adoptive families last year alone.

“My concern is that when these 129,000 children see so many Americans stepping over them to go abroad, they will feel a sense of not being good enough,” Rita Soronen, executive director for the Dave Thomas Foundation, told FOXNews.com.

Soronen believes that misconceptions about the well-being of the children, and the time and cost involved in domestic adoptions, may lead prospective parents to look overseas first.

According to Adoptive Families magazine, the estimated cost to adopt a child in China is \$20,000-\$25,000. The estimated cost for a Guatemalan adoption is \$25,000-\$30,000, and adopting a Russian child is estimated at \$30,000-\$40,000. According to the National Council for Adoption, domestic costs range from \$8,000-\$40,000, with the typical price falling between \$15,000-\$25,000. So adopting overseas has no real cost benefit.

International adoptions are also not necessarily faster than U.S adoptions. According to statistics provided by the American Adoptions agency, the wait time is similar, with international adoption processes averaging between 10-12 months, and domestic waits taking between one and 28 months. New laws and tighter international restrictions have also slowed the process substantially in once-popular countries like China and Guatemala.

As for the well-being of American kids versus their foreign counterparts? "There is an idea that because these kids come from unfortunate circumstances, that they are juvenile delinquents – this couldn't be further from the truth, they are just as viable as any other child," Soronen said.

There are other more personal factors that may lead people to adopt foreign children. Experts say some parents turn to foreign countries because they think foreign birth parents are less likely to try to reclaim the child later through legal means.

"I suppose it's a valid fear for celebrities," says Spence Chapin social worker Linda Alexandre, who works on domestic adoptions. "But it is highly unlikely when done through a professional agency, where birth parents go through extensive counseling."

Madonna found out the hard way that international adoptions don't preclude parental interference when the father of her adopted Malawian son, David Banda, protested.

But Madonna got David eventually, and can still appeal the judge's decision on Mercy. On Wednesday, Madonna's lawyer Alan Chinula dismissed Malawi's adoption laws as "archaic" and said "no law in Malawi can stop this adoption."

"Ideally, Madonna's celebrity and wealth should be taken out of the equation when the judge decides what is best for this child in question," said Jennifer Goodbody, assistant director of international adoption at the Spence Chapin agency.

"If the child's family wants to keep her, and their rights have not been terminated legally, then hopefully the authorities would honor that."

Madonna's rep was not immediately available for comment Friday morning.

*FOXNews.com's Allison McGevna and the Associated Press contributed to this report.*

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