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## Quebec holding new Haitian adoption requests over child smuggling fear

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Jonas Espérance, 2, plays with dolls at the La Maison D'enfant Espoir d'enfants orphanage in Santo, Port au Prince, Haiti, Tuesday January 19, 2009, seven days after a magnitude 7 earthquake that hit the country. Esperance was to be adopted by a Quebec family but the adoption was delayed by the Canadian

**Photograph by:** THE GAZETTE/Phil Carpenter,

The Quebec government has put on hold all new adoption applications for Haitian children as part of an international effort to prevent a repeat of the child smuggling that occurred after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami.

On Monday, a United Nations agency urged caution with any new adoptions, given that the events unfolding in Haiti make it impossible to verify the personal and family situation of children.

The provincial directive, effective immediately, applies to all new applications involving Haiti — not applications already processed by Quebec authorities and approved by the Haitian government.

The federal government has announced it will expedite pending applications by fast-tracking the visas and other paperwork that falls under federal jurisdiction at the end of the international adoption process.

Damage from the earthquake and aftershocks, however, is making it difficult for Canadian government officials on the ground in Haiti to work as fast as they would like, according to an official with Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

Kelli Fraser said the adoption process was further complicated by the fact that the Haitian judge who processes adoption applications has reportedly been killed, and the building housing existing files has been destroyed.

Across Quebec, adoption agencies have seen a spike in the number of calls from residents wanting to open their homes to Haitian children. But despite the outpouring, provincial government officials said Tuesday that child trafficking remains a real threat and makes it necessary that the process be suspended temporarily.

"There will be no new dossiers opened," at the moment, said Karine Whyte, a spokeswoman for Quebec's department of social services.

Whyte said the situation is fluid and will be re-evaluated regularly.

In recent days, Canada's Immigration Minister Jason Kenney also has pointed to confirmed reports out of Sri Lanka that child traffickers and kidnappers used the chaos of the situation to falsely adopt children after the 2004 tsunami.

"We can't allow that to happen," Kenney said over the weekend.

Although Whyte did not know how many adoption applications are currently underway, she said about 55 Haitian children are adopted by Quebec families annually.

When attempting to reach representatives from two accredited Quebec-based adoption agencies that have a long history of matching children from Haiti with Quebec families, their phone lines have been jammed and the voice mail boxes full.

The federal government, for its part, is asking all parents who have begun the adoption process of children in Haiti to call Citizenship and Immigration Canada at 1-888-242-2100, or look for updates of the situation being posted on the government's website at [cic.gc.ca](http://cic.gc.ca).

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