

REUNITE

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Reunite International Child Abduction Centre is an information and resource centre and we have been established for 22 years working in the area of the movement of children across **international** borders. Our advice line handles over 7 000 calls a year covering cases of international parental child abduction, prevention of abduction, contact, and leave to remove from one legal jurisdiction to another.

Since 2002 we have been operating a successful mediation service involving member States of the 1980 Convention and to date we have mediated in 62 cases involving 26 countries.

A challenge we set ourselves was to adapt our existing mediation model so it could be used in cases between the United Kingdom and Non-Hague States and to then test the mediation model, initially with one non-Hague State.

Together with our Foreign and Commonwealth Office, we identified there are a high number of cases of abduction, wrongful retention and contact between the UK and Egypt. Because of the unique relationship between the United Kingdom and Egypt, we believed it would be possible to work in partnership with an Egyptian non-governmental organisation to develop a mediation model in line with reunite's model and which focuses on the best interests of the child. We also believed Egypt was the right country for us to work with in partnership due to the fact that we have the UK-Cairo Declaration, which was signed in 2005.

Stage 1

In October 2007, **reunite** and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office travelled to Cairo to meet with a number of non-governmental organisations **to identify a possible partner who would be willing, and who would have the capacity, to work with reunite in establishing a pilot mediation service. We were** fortunate to meet with the Association for the Development and Enhancement of Women, known as ADEW.

Reunite has since travelled to Cairo on three separate occasions over the last 13 months to deliver training to ADEW in the reunite mediation model and in the setting up of administrative procedures. Through this partnership reunite has been able to provide expertise from a formal perspective, including the actual model of mediation and the administrative system which is vital to any successful mediation service.

Stage 2

ADEW identified key caseworkers within their organisation who were interested in mediation and who brought the necessary expertise of local knowledge and practical experience of working with families in high conflict situations. Reunite then delivered a training programme focussing on the practical mediation skills that would be necessary to enable the ADEW team to co-mediate with reunite's specialist mediators.

Reunite also established a comprehensive monitoring and feedback system so that cases could be monitored and evaluated at every stage of the mediation process.

This enabled us to:

- (1) start to mediate actual cases;
- (2) ensure the trainees put into practice what they had learnt through the training programme;

- (3) ensure that the trainees were supported and only mediated with an experienced and qualified mediator.

Successes to date

Even though this project is still in its infancy, we have developed a good working partnership with ADEW and we continue to work together on cases.

To date we have mediated in 5 cases; in 4 of these we assisted the parents in reaching an agreement on how contact between the left-behind parent and child could be established on a regular basis and in a positive environment. In the remaining case, sadly the mediation broke down as the parents were not able to find common ground to work from in the best interests of their child.

We currently have 5 cases pending and we hope these will progress to a full mediation over the next few months.

Feedback from parents has indicated that the mediation has improved their relationship as parents, which in turn has improved or established contact between the child and the left-behind parent.

Barriers and limitations to a successful mediation

When looking at the barriers and limitations to a successful mediation, we need to consider the following:

- Are parents willing to voluntarily participate in mediation;
- For mediation to be successful the parent has to trust the service and the service has to demonstrate its independency from the court process;
- What further can be done to raise awareness of the mediation service and encourage the use of mediation;
- Governments need to demonstrate that they value the use of mediation and make funds available;
- The success of mediation is dependent upon the professionalism and expertise of the mediators;
- When parents reach an agreement through mediation, how best can the agreement be made into a court/consent order through the judicial process to ensure it is legally binding and enforceable in both States.

Moving forward

- 1) We need to continue to work alongside our partners in Egypt to build on the existing foundations and ensure that this pilot mediation service becomes accessible to parents of all nationalities.
- 2) This project with Egypt will hopefully be used as the template for a mediation service in partnership with a non-governmental organisation in Islamabad, Pakistan, which is currently being discussed by reunite and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.
- 3) Reunite would like to open a dialogue with other non-Hague Convention States who would be willing to consider joining us in a partnership to develop a mediation service.
- 4) Our hope for mediation is that long-term it will become an established tool that will ensure that children caught up in the conflict of a family breakdown are able to maintain contact with both parents, both countries and both cultures.
- 5) Reunite will be travelling to Egypt again in July to undertake mediation in further cases and to meet with the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry for Family and Population and

other professionals to discuss further initiatives which can be taken forward between the two countries.

For further information on the work of **Reunite** please view our website at www.reunite.org or contact us on (0044) 116 2555 345.