

This is As It Is. Thanks for joining us today. I'm June Simms in Washington.

Today on the program, more and more Chinese couples are having babies by women in the United States. We tell why the practice is growing in popularity coming up later in the show.

But first, Cambodia has announced plans to restart international adoptions this year. The move comes four years after the government suspended the practice after widespread reports of children being trafficked. Steve Ember has the story from VOA's Robert Carmichael in Phnom Penh.

## **Cambodia to Restart International Adoptions**

When it comes to international adoptions, Cambodia has had a poor record. For many years, local media reported many stories of poor parents being tricked into giving up their children.

The children were being placed with foreign families, in exchange for thousands of dollars in so-called processing costs. Security checks were often not carried out on the people seeking to adopt.

The situation was so bad that in 2001 several countries barred their citizens from adopting children from Cambodia. France, the United States and the United Kingdom were among those countries.

The Hague Conference, or HCCH, is an international governmental organization that works to balance laws across national borders. In recent years, the group has joined with UNICEF to help the Cambodian government improve its adoption process.

Laura Martinez-Mora is the group's main legal officer. She says Cambodia has made good progress. This includes passing a law on international adoptions and supporting legislation.

She says workers are training local officials to make sure the parents have given their permission and that they fully understand what they have agreed to.

“They have done so after being informed and counseled, and after having tried that they keep their child, so that there is information, they know what they are signing and even if they don't know how to read, they know what they are saying yes to.”

Another issue is making sure the children have birth certificates. That is important in many countries, and a problem in Cambodia where less than 40 percent of children have one.

“So we need to have essential safeguards to do inter-country adoptions as well as domestic adoptions. For example, to be sure that Child A is really Child A, that there is no problem with the birth certificate. Other types of issues like this need to be in place before any adoption takes place. So these are the things that Cambodia is working on now.”

Under the terms of the 1993 Hague Adoption Convention, which Cambodia has signed, participating states are required to put the interests of the child first. The number one goal is to try to keep the child with their birth family or their extended family.

If that is not possible, the next step is to try to find a home within the country. Experts want Cambodia to do more to support domestic adoption over the third and last possibility, which is international adoption.

States must also put safety measures in place to prevent the kidnapping, sale and trafficking of children for adoption. And they must guarantee that there is no corruption in the process. That continues to be a major issue in Cambodia. Last year, Transparency International ranked the country as one of the 20 most corrupt in the world.

UNICEF Cambodia's deputy representative, Sun Ah Kim, says several important measures still need to be in put in place. She says staff must receive the correct training. They have to make sure that the children are really in need of adoption. And, she says, they must also make sure the adopting parents are qualified.

“As of now, not all these requirements are in place. The resumption of adoptions should take place gradually to guarantee the proper and orderly implementation of both the International Country Adoption Law and the Hague Convention.”

The Ministry of Social Affairs says that 3,800 Cambodian children were adopted internationally between 1997 and 2009. That is the year Cambodia suspended adoptions. The recent announcement suggests that the country believes it is close to meeting the necessary requirements to begin again.

I’m Steve Ember.

You are listening to As It Is, from VOA Learning English. I’m June Simms in Washington.

## **Chinese Couples Having Babies by American Moms**

More Chinese families are looking for surrogate mothers in the United States. A surrogate mother is a woman who agrees to become pregnant and carry a baby to full term for another woman who cannot have children. Surrogacy is illegal at most hospitals in China. But agencies are now connecting Chinese couples with Americans who will carry their children for a price.

Tony Jiang and his wife Cherry live in Shanghai. The couple has three children, all born in the United States to an American surrogate mother. Their daughter and twins were born in California.

“The elder girl is now three years old. The younger twins are now 13 months.”

The couple had twice tried surrogacy services in China through military hospitals, which can legally perform the operation. But their efforts were unsuccessful. They then contacted a surrogacy agency in the United States. There, they connected with Amanda, a California woman who wishes to use only her first name. She gave birth to all three of the Jiangs’ children.

“Cherry was actually in the room with me when Nicole was born so she got to actually witness the birth and see Nicole come into this world. And she was so ecstatic, and she was crying, and she was just so happy.”

China changed its one child policy last year. It now permits couples to have two children if one of the parents is an only child. This has led to an increase in the number of families seeking to have children.

The Jiangs are among an increasing number of wealthy Chinese couples seeking to have babies by women in the United States. That decision comes with other values.

Under the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, anyone born in the United States has a right to citizenship. U.S. citizens may also apply for green cards for their parents when they turn 21.

Tony Jiang started an agency in Shanghai that works with Chinese couples who want to have children. He says most couples, like him and his wife, seek surrogate mothers because they are medically unable to have children themselves. They choose the United States because of the high quality of its health care system.

“More and more patients are inquiring about services at clinics.”

Surrogacy services can cost as much as \$120,000. However, Chinese couples are increasingly willing to pay those high prices for the chance to have a child born in the United States.

And that is As It Is, from VOA Learning English. I’m June Simms. Thanks for joining us. VOA world news is coming up at the beginning of the hour Universal Time.