



For The Children Of The World

PO Box 58694
Renton, WA 98058

January 29, 2010

Dear host family:

We are sorry that we are writing today with some very sad news. We regret to inform you that For The Children of The World is going to have to cancel our support for families to provide private invitations for previously hosted Belarusian children for the summer of 2010. We know how much it means to you to be able to bring back the children you have hosted before. However, based on information from Belarus and from Children of Chernobyl US Alliance (CoCUSA), we have now come to believe that not encouraging families to initiate the private invitations this year is an unfortunate necessity. The FTCOTW Board has discussed this situation a great deal prior to its decision to take this unfortunate and unexpected step.

With our hearts set on finding a way for the children from Belarus to visit the US again, we investigated opportunities early on with the U.S. Embassy in Moscow and with our partners in Belarus. From a processing standpoint it seemed that nothing stood in the way of hosting the returning children under the umbrella of a "rest visa", which is by private invitation, instead of as a "health respite visa" as part of an organized program, which has been banned by the Belarusian government for now. We have been acting on this premise for several months now, fully intending to provide assistance to host families who wished to bring back the children from Belarus. However, new information from the U.S. Dept of State and from the CoCUSA has convinced us that it would be unwise to attempt this. It is for the sake of the very children we are hosting, and those who work with them in Belarus in partnership with us, that we have decided to cancel our hosting support efforts for Belarus this year.

Here are some of the concerns that have been brought to our attention. In response to the question about the private invitations, a U.S. Dept of State official said:

"...a chief concern we would have is that it is possible the Belarusian government will get wind of the programs getting visas through Moscow and may decide to take additional steps to shut down the programs."

A Belarusian Embassy official said:

"...nothing has changed since the decree was issued AND no agreement is signed yet with the U.S; it [private invites] should not be promoted."
and *"...if they are a State employee going against Decree 555 they could face problems."*

As you may know the many school teachers and directors we work with in Belarus, as well as some other partners we have there, are State employees who could face negative consequences if we were to go forward.

Children of Chernobyl USA Alliance says,

“The biggest concern we have had all along with the private invitations was for the Belarusians, be it government reaction, partner fallout and what may happen to the families there.”

Children of Chernobyl, USA Alliance has now come up with the following position:

“CofCUSA strongly suggests that organization leaders respect the Belarus rule of law (Decree 555) and the U.S. Department of State’s request to not be involved in extending private invitations.”

Because of this change of perspective that has come to us in this past week, we no longer feel it advisable to attempt to host the children by private invitation. In the best interest of the future of our program and those of other US organizations, our partners in Belarus, and even the children we host each year, we have come to this unfortunate decision. This means that FTCOTW will not be able to help you bring your host child in Summer 2010. At this time, only children from Ukraine will participate in a FTCOTW summer hosting program for 2010.

When you are able to consider how you might keep in contact with your Belarusian child and continue to show your love and support, here are some suggestions:

1. Host another child in our Ukraine Program! There are still some Ukrainian children remaining on the website list of Available Children. There is always more love to give – and receive!
2. Roll your host account funds over for next year.
3. Send a specific gift to Belarus for your child. Elizabeth Tennison and former host mom Tammy Lyngaas have tickets to travel to Minsk March 18-April 1. As per IRS regulation, they cannot take cash from your host account to give to your host child. This would have to come from you directly.
Please limit your gift to a quart size baggie, preferably with letter, photos, money only; labeled with your child’s name, village, your name and contents.
4. Designate some of your host account funds (or funds you contribute for this purpose) to be used for a second “Coats and Boots” style supply effort for the kids in the school your host child attends. We were only able to cover the 1st and 2nd graders of each school last year, plus supply those host kids whose host families asked us to. Maybe the new 1st graders and the 4th graders would be a good target group.

Despite the governments’ inability to conclude a child return agreement that would allow the restart of health respite programs, these children remain in need!

We realize this is not an easy decision to make or to receive. Our deepest apologies for all the grief this causes you, your family and your host child. When you are able, let us know what you’d like to do from the above choices. We will need that information by mid-February.

If a health respite program policy agreement between Belarus and the United States is reached in time to carry out a hosting program this year, we will certainly let you know what the options may be for families to host the Belarusian children. This still remains a great hope in all of our hearts.

Sincerely,

The Board of For the Children of the World

Mike Hlavaty-LaPosa, President
Elizabeth Tennison, Vice-President-Belarus
Janet Hlavaty-LaPosa, Vice-President-Ukraine
Kevin Miller, Secretary/Webmaster
Jennifer Henning, Treasurer
Barbara Houplin Garcia
Jason Herres
Mike McClelland
Cynthia Reid
Jennifer Riley