

United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

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Contact:
adam_sharon@foreign.senate.gov

Chairman Menendez Opening Remarks at Hearing on International Parental Child Abduction

WASHINGTON, DC – U.S. Sen. Robert Menendez (D-NJ), Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, delivered the below statement, as prepared for delivery, at today's hearing on International Parental Child Abduction.

“Let me welcome our panelists. Thank you for being here to help the Committee better understand the scope and nature of the tragic problem of parental child abductions around the world and what we can do to change the dynamic. We look forward to your perspective on the international implementation of the 1980 Hague Convention on Civil Aspects of International Children Abduction and on the effectiveness of our government's efforts to bring these children home. I'm particularly interested in what we can do to help the parents of these children, and what new tools may be available to prevent more abductions in the future.

Each year *over 1,000 children* are abducted from American homes and taken to a foreign country. Too often, they are permanently out of reach of U.S. law and are never returned.

It was David Goldman's extraordinary five-year battle to bring his son, Sean, home from Brazil that helped highlight the horrendous problem of international parental child abduction. David Goldman, who will be on our second panel, is from New Jersey which brings this close to home for me. But far too many parents have waited far too long for the return of an abducted child, and David has helped focus the world's attention on the heartbreak of child abduction.

As a parent, I can only imagine the emotional toll of having a child abducted and taken abroad, and be helpless to get them back. That's why we're here today – to learn what more we can do to help bring these children home.

Also with us today, from New Jersey, is Bindu Phillips who lost her twin sons Albert Philip Jacob and Alfred William Jacob.

Their father Sunil Jacob took the family to India on an impromptu vacation and kept them there against the mother's wishes.

For five years Bindu Philips has fought legal battles, where the case has been pending for four years before the Supreme Court of India. The New Jersey Supreme Court has given Bindu Philips legal and residential custody but their requests have been ignored.

The fact is, India is not a signatory of the Hague Convention. As of now, the case has not been resolved.

The U.S. Senate ratified the Hague Abduction Convention to create a civil framework for the quick return of abducted children, but – though the Convention has helped return many children – it is, by no means, fool-proof.

In countries that are party to the Hague Convention, 73 percent of abducted children are returned. But if a child is abducted to a country that does not participate in the Convention, the rate of return of children is 27 percent. At the end of the day, the rate of return of abducted children should be 100 percent.

Today, we hope to gain insight into how we can move toward that mark and how we can do more to prevent there from being any safe havens anywhere in the world for those who abduct children and how we can better assist parents in bringing abducted children home where they legally and rightfully belong.

As part of that effort, this Committee is looking at legislative options and is reviewing language now. My hope is that we can make the House-passed Goldman bill even better by bolstering prevention options so children are less likely to be abducted in the first place.

With that, let me turn to Senator Corker for his opening remarks.”

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