

**Statement for Hearing on
“Abducted Abroad: Exploring the Plight of International Parental Child Abduction
and its Effect on American Families”**

Senator Kamala D. Harris

April 24, 2018

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank everyone for joining us to discuss such a critical—and heart-wrenching—issue, and that is the issue of international parental child abduction.

Every year, more than 600 American children are reported to the State Department as victims of international parental child abduction. According to the State Department, over the past decade, more than 11,000 American children were abducted. Return US Home, Inc., a nonprofit committed to combatting parental child abduction, reports that every day at least three children are illegally taken abroad by a parent. Tragically, only 18 percent of internationally abducted children will ever be united with the parent left behind.

Californians know this pain all too well. In 2016, California had 220 cases of international parental child abduction—the highest of any state.

This week my office spoke to Randy Collins, a California resident and “left behind father.” Randy last saw his son and only child on June 15, 2008—Father’s Day. The last words he said to his son were “I love you. See you tomorrow.” On June 16, Randy’s ex-wife took their child to Japan and never returned. Randy has sought justice through international and domestic courts but to no avail. It has been almost a decade since Randy has seen his son.

Randy’s story is tragically familiar. In August 2016, the California Department of Justice helped reunite 9-year-old twins with their mother, Jenn Luckman Conant, after a visit with their Father in Mexico. When Jenn realized that her children were not on their scheduled return flight, an intense two-week investigation ensued. Thankfully, with the help of California law enforcement and Mexican officials, the children were safely recovered and returned to their mother.

We must work to ensure that there are no more stories like this. In a recent town hall, I promised my constituent, Zuber Farooqui, that I would do all I can to address the complexities of international parental child abduction and fight for California’s “left behind parents.”

Recent reforms to domestic and international law are praiseworthy, but there is much more to be done. The 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction has created an international framework requiring partner nations to return abducted children to their habitual residence. The Convention is laudable in its mission but limited in application—only signatories are bound, judges in partner nations are often unfamiliar with its dictates, and it does not have the teeth of enforcement.

The Goldman Act of 2014, passed, in part, to address the Convention’s weaknesses, requires the Secretary of State to identify and take action against countries that refuse to cooperate in resolving international abductions cases. In fact, section 202 of the Act states that the Secretary is “expected” to take action when a country refuses to work with the Department to bring home American children. These actions range from public condemnation, cancellation of bilateral visits, to withholding foreign assistance. However, the Act has failed to be adequately enforced. In 2016, 13 countries were found to be non-compliant and yet, the State Department has only issued one public condemnation in the past three years.

It is clear that the existing regulatory framework is not enough. Congress must do all it can to prevent international parental child abduction and ensure that abducted American children are safely returned. I think we can all agree that one abducted child is one too many.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

###