

Decisions about adoption should not be made during crisis, experts insist

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PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti—Children wander amid rubble, lost, hungry, scared and emotionally numbed by all they have seen. These images of Haiti's children—the most fragile citizens of an already impoverished nation plummeted into full-blown crisis by January's earthquake—have mobilized well-meaning Americans to want to do something to help.

Rather than hopping on a plane and heading into a crisis situation in Haiti, Christians should empower agencies that have an established presence in the country, said Randy Daniels, Buckner International's vice president for global operations.

Rebecca Hackworth, director of social services for [Dillon International](#), a nonprofit agency affiliated with [Buckner International](#), is at work in Haiti, helping Dillon's sister agency, the [Foundation for the Children of Haiti](#), with relief efforts at its orphanages, school and hospital in Port-au-Prince. She has witnessed firsthand the dangers posed to children.

"There are children on the streets who don't even know their last name. They are vulnerable and easy prey for evil purposes of all kinds," she said.

It's a situation that wrenches the heart. The impulse to rescue is strong.

"Immediately following the earthquake in Haiti, the public reaction was

that there would be scores of children coming over to America that would need a place to stay,” said Deniese Dillon, Dillon International’s co-founder and executive director. The agency, which offers international adoption opportunities in 10 countries, received thousands of calls and e-mails from families eager to open their homes to children who lost everything in the earthquake. “They really had good intentions, and they were so caught up in the emotion of the moment.”



Rebecca Hackworth, director of social services for Dillon International, has witnessed firsthand the dangers children in Haiti face as she has worked the Foundation for the Children of Haiti and its relief efforts at orphanages, school and hospital in Port au Prince.

However, adoption is not an option in the immediate wake of the disaster. Time must be taken to determine if a child truly is orphaned by the earthquake or temporarily separated from family members in the midst of

the chaos. Then there are other alternatives, such as placement with extended family members or domestic adoption within Haiti, to be explored.

“Generally speaking, removing children from their birth country should be a last resort,” Dillon said.

When [international adoption](#) becomes a possibility, it is a decision families should reach after careful analysis, never on an emotional impulse, Hackworth added.

“Many people are moved by the disaster and think helping one child is a manageable thing to do. They have not always thought through their desire to be parents or the length and intensity of the international adoption process,” she said.

“International adoption includes background checks, home studies, verification of financial resources, meeting health and age criteria, the support of friends and extended family and the ability to take a lengthy initial leave from work to help the child attach to his new family.”

There are other ways families can share their love with Haiti’s children, she added.

“If you want to rescue someone, choosing a child sponsorship program that will enable their physical and educational needs to be met is an excellent alternative to help,” she said.

Families longing to reach out to Haiti’s children right now are urged to offer prayer support and to donate to reputable relief organizations that have well-established plans for meeting the needs of Haiti’s children, said Dillon, whose agency has provided humanitarian relief in the country for 20 years.



Rebecca Hackworth with some friends
in Haiti.

Together, Dillon and Buckner International have a longterm commitment to build a brighter future with the people of Haiti.

“Buckner’s direction and purpose in Haiti is to help Haitian families rebuild their ability to care for their own children with the guidance and reinforcement of people from that country,” said Randy Daniels, Buckner’s vice president for global operations.

“There’s an impulse for people to want to jump on a plane and do something, but that is not always the best thing. If you want to help now, you need to empower agencies that are already established and working in Haiti to do the work unless you have skills that are needed today.”

Although the tragedy in Haiti inspires a sense of urgency, Dillon noted other countries also engage in a daily struggle to meet the needs of their children.

“Every child that is in our care has had an earthquake or tsunami-type heartbreak in their lives. And long after the focus shifts from Haiti, the work of making a better life for homeless children everywhere will go on.”