

Jovana Jones
Adoptive Parent
16 July 2014 – The Growing Crisis of Africa’s Orphans
House Committee on Foreign Affairs

We first saw our daughter, who we’ll name Ana Lei when she arrives—we first saw Ana Lei in April 2013 on a special needs adoption website. We decided early on to adopt an older child internationally with a hearing impairment because we read many cases where deaf, older children are often overlooked and grow up without a language or the ability to communicate. A few months ago, we were pleased to hear that Ana Lei’s orphanage was within walking distance from a school, only to be disappointed that she was unable to attend the school and learn with the other children because of her hearing impairment. The idea of being trapped inside your own mind, frustrated with the inability to express your thoughts and feelings, and ostracized from your friends—it’s heartbreaking to even think about.

My family and I are the solution, if just for Ana Lei. We are willing, able, and ready to bring this princess into our home to give her endless opportunities to love, communicate, share her dreams, fears, and excitement.

I love to educate myself in what would be her first language— American Sign Language. Over the last several years, I’ve taken courses and have volunteered at Gallaudet, the deaf university just minutes from here. My family has participated in deaf events and attended deaf church services...anything we can do to immerse ourselves and increase our knowledge and skills in the deaf culture. We also attend adoption conferences and take prep classes for adoptive parents so that we are fully aware of the good, bad, and ugly for when Ana Lei comes home.

Our children have been eagerly waiting (especially our biological daughter) for their sister to come home so that they could have tea parties, show her dance moves, and sign bedtime stories. As a family we enjoy signing during meal times, using caption whenever we watch TV, and having a weekly movie time where we watch an all-deaf, 30-minute educational kids show. We homeschool our children and we have Ana Lei’s school desk and preschool supplies ready for her when she comes home. I have read books about teaching deaf children and have an awesome support group of moms home schooling their deaf children.

My husband and we have been an Active Duty Air Force family for over 15 years. For the last 3 years, we’ve made it our mission to prepare financially and logistically for this adoption. We’ve sacrificed family vacations and have held several fundraisers for this costly adoption. Our church was instrumental, not only in giving, but also in emotional and spiritual support.

Painstakingly, but gratefully we've raised all the funds needed for the adoption. We've bought furniture, and prepped and painted Ana Lei's room. As a military trained technician, my husband has planned to upgrade and install strobe light smoke detectors, doorbell signals, and other home devices for the hearing impaired. The nearby military bases will also offer family support through classes and workshops, and with the natural diversity that the military brings, our Congolese American daughter would blend right into playgroups, sports teams, and homeschool groups.

We are more than ready for Ana Lei's arrival. After years of studying, enduring financial burdens, not to mention the countless hours of reading, completing, and mailing reams of adoption forms—indeed my family has sacrificed much. We realize, though, that our hardship however, is well worth Ana Lei's education, her happiness and her life.

As adoptive parents, we've spent years preparing and it is imperative that our children come home immediately. We have done our part. Our families have done all we can and we are at our limit. We boldly ask for the backing and support of our President, congressmen, and elected officials, that you all draw your focus on removing any further delays of the adoption process within the countries of Africa. We sincerely appreciate the efforts that have been made thus far, but frankly it's not enough. It's not enough until we have each orphan home with his or her American family. Each moment of delay makes it more difficult for them to adjust and more challenging for the parents to provide them care. Our arms are open now, and our homes are ready to receive them today. We pray that our government mirrors our dedication and acts now so that our children come home soon.