

Chinese officials have now banned unregistered religious groups and persons from forcing abandoned and orphaned children to follow their faith by adopting them in the name of their religion.

The Ministry of Civil Affairs and State Administration of Religious Affairs jointly issued a notice that though religious groups have greatly contributed to taking care of these lost children, there have been numerous issues concerning their unbiased education and care under these religious groups.

As of today, only registered religious groups that have both their facilities and personnel files available for government inspection are allowed to adopt in the name of their faith. In order to register, the groups must demonstrate adequate financial resources, conformity to standardized safety regulations as well as specialized requirements for child care.

Groups and organizations wishing to run homes and orphanages are urged to increase their standards and improve their infrastructure and adoption capacities in order to receive state compensation.

Officials will be available from the Ministry and State Administration to help organizations improve their conditions to meet the new criteria and strengthen their services as long as their various activities are conducted legally.

If standards are not met even after rectification work, authorities will shut down the affected organizations adoption services with possible police action if required, the affected children due to be sent to their legal guardians or, if none are found, to state charity homes.

These actions are seen as part of a long-running effort by the Chinese government to improve their adoption system via clearer regulations and increased social impact both domestically and abroad. The country has now formed adoption agreements with 138 different government bodies and children's organizations spread out over 17 nations. Over 100 000 Chinese-born children have been adopted overseas since the 1980s, providing an important channel to find homes for the orphaned and the disabled. A high number most likely attributable to the one-child policy the Chinese government has long enforced as a means of strict population control.

Reports are abound, however, that these overseas adoption numbers have been in steady decline due precisely to the stricter regulations, prohibiting single people, the morbidly obese, anyone facially deformed, anyone who has recently been on anti-depressants and anyone over 50 from adopting healthy children. Single women are also required to sign an affidavit that they are not homosexual in order to adopt the only children they are allowed to – special needs and children with physical disabilities. Coupled with these regulations, there also appears to be a growing sentiment within the country in opposition to sending orphans abroad according to reports from late last year by CNN.

China's population is estimated today to be in excess of 1.2 billion people. Numbers from 2009 by the Ministry of Civil Affairs range up to 700 000 orphans in China, of which an estimated 92 000 reside in orphanages. Numbers that are believed to have been rapidly increasing since then, and that is only the official estimates reported by local authorities. Countless others are believed to be part of unregistered adoptions, abandoned to their own devices or involved in criminal activities.