



### E27 International Child Abduction

*Serdar S. Kelahmet, MBA\*, Cumhuriyet Meydani, Besim Yucel Ishani, Kat 1 Daire 1, Iskenderum, 31200, TURKEY; and Mete K. Gulmen, PhD, MD, Cukurova University, School of Medicine, Department of Forensic Medicine, Adana, 01330, TURKEY*

After attending this presentation, attendees will develop an awareness of the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. Attendees will also learn the importance of integrating the disciplines of law, forensic science, and child psychology when dealing with abduction cases, as well as the problems that can arise when dealing with cultural differences among signatory countries.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by fostering awareness of the importance of international conventions that create a common language and deal with the humanitarian aspects of child abduction cases, in a way that fosters a child-centered system free from cultural bias.

In a world that reached seven billion people by mid-2011, nearly 2.9 billion, or 42% of the world's population are children up to 18 years-of-age. Not surprisingly, children are often exploited, and in some areas of the world, child labor, child soldiers, and child abductions are rampant.

In addition, ease of travel and communications has affected not only economic and business relations, but has led to an increase in international marriage, and its counterpoint, international divorce. Unfortunately, children sometimes become pawns in these struggles, and one parent, intent on causing pain to the other, may resolve a child custody dispute by kidnapping the child in question. When this happens, everyone suffers.

For parents, there is nothing more terrifying than losing a child in this fashion. Words cannot describe the torture the parent feels—is the child lost, hurt, hungry, afraid, or alone? Will the child ever come back? And the kidnapped child is suddenly isolated from all that is familiar, wrenched from home and thrust into an unknown world. Oftentimes, the child is told that the “left behind parent” no longer wants him, or even has died.

The kidnapped child can face serious psychological and emotional problems. These include anxiety, nightmares, sleep disorders, aggressive behaviors, and phobias as a direct result of being neglected and exploited.

The Hague Convention of the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction of 1980 aims to create a legal solution to international custody disputes. Often, that results in an order returning the child to his “habitual residence” as being in the best interests of the child. Factors to be weighed include an objective viewing of the child's spiritual, psychological, and educational needs. Indeed, actions of a kidnapping parent who curtails a child's access to a loving “left behind parent” and cuts off his relations with other family and friends could be described as both physical and emotional negligence. Such children may respond to this family stress by exhibiting anti-social behavior and suffer a marked lack of self-confidence. The “habitual residence” analysis, aided by a combined psychological, legal and forensic approach, may help repair the damage inflicted by fractured international families.

**Law, Child Abuse, Exploit and Neglect**