

PRESS RELEASE
FROM CHILD WELFARE SERVICES, STAVANGER, NORWAY

Norwegian embassies, Norwegian governmental agencies and the local authorities of Stavanger have the last few days received numerous requests for comments regarding a child protection case in Stavanger concerning two children who are Indian citizens. We are aware that the children's parents, and their supporters, have launched a media-campaign in India where they have presented their version and given their description of the reasons for the intervention of the Child Welfare Services. Examples given by the parents for the intervention are criticism of feeding methods and sleeping arrangements. The impression given is that Norwegian authorities have intervened on basis of cultural prejudice and that the case is a result of cultural insensitivity and as such an insult to India and Indian way of life.

The Child Welfare Services are governed by the Child Welfare act. All decisions to remove children from their parents' custody are made by a family court (County Committee) based on an assessment from the Child Welfare Services and hearing from the private party (the parents). In this process the parents are entitled to free legal service. The decision to remove the two children from their parents' custody was taken by the County Committee on the 28th of November. The committee's decision was unanimous in finding "that the conditions for care order for..... have been met". Both the parents and the Indian Embassy in Oslo have received an English translation of the ruling. In the ruling of the court there are no references to the explanations given by the parents to the media as grounds for the ruling. The parent's lawyer has launched an appeal before Tingretten (District court). A date has not been scheduled for the new trial.

As head of the Child Welfare Services I most strongly deny that this case in any way is based on cultural prejudice or misinterpretation. I am unable to give any comments regarding the particular grounds in this case because of our duty of confidentiality.

On a general note I can say the following:

The Child Welfare Service has a responsibility to intervene if measures in the home are not sufficient to meet a child's needs. The act lists strict conditions for when a care order applies. Examples are when a child is mistreated or subjected to other serious abuses at home, or when there is every probability that the child's health or development may be seriously harmed because the parents are incapable of taking adequate responsibility for their child.

I would also like to underline that the Norwegian Child Welfare Act applies to all children in Norway, regardless of the child's nationality, citizenship or cultural background.

The Child Welfare services are always committed to finding a solution that will be in the best interest of the children. We are therefore at present in dialogue with the Indian embassy and the parents' legal representative to find a solution that we can recommend to the appeal court.

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Head of Child Welfare Services
Stavanger, Norway