

Special Achievement Award – Assistant Attorney General Daniel Strong

Assistant Attorney General Daniel Strong from the United-States is being awarded a Special Achievement Award for his work on the largest human smuggling case in his state's history. Paul Petersen, a wealthy elected official, misused his authority and power to transport over 60 pregnant women from the Marshall Islands, for the purpose of giving their children up to be adopted by American families. This was a for profit scheme, where the women were kept in poor living conditions and offered no pre-natal care. The women were promised care and money, neither of which were received. The parents adopting the children were not made aware of the circumstances, which lead to the children being with Mr Petersen for adoption.

Petersen was charged with over 60 felony charges in three US states, following an investigation that included multijurisdictional cooperation. He was eventually convicted of human smuggling, harboring immigrants for financial gain, communications fraud, and public assistance fraud, among others. The case served to further the debate in respect of international adoptions and the potential for abuse.

The prosecution was difficult, as it did not fit neatly within child protection laws in Utah, and the mothers were returned to the Marshall Islands after giving birth. Even when they could be found, they typically did not speak English, nor did they wish to relive their experience. Similarly, the parents who had adopted the children were not interested in engaging with authorities, for fear of losing their children. The key to the matter, uncovered through prosecutor Strong's diligence, was a treaty between the United-States and the Marshall Islands, prohibiting visa-free travel between the countries. This turned out to be the lynchpin on which a prosecution could be launched against Petersen.

Mr. Strong worked closely with officials in the Marshall Islands and neighbouring US states where Petersen operated the same scheme. When Petersen was convicted, the Attorney General of the Marshall Islands released a statement thanking US prosecutors, most notably prosecutor Daniel Strong.

Mr. Strong's work on this case demonstrated a commitment to international collaboration, but also to upholding human rights and the rule of law.