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FACT SHEET: BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION FACILITIES

In almost every region of the world, there are facilities for the treatment of minor children with drug/alcohol and/or problems. These private and state-owned overseas treatment centers can often be characterized as "Behavior Modification Facilities." Parents/guardians enroll their minor children in these facilities in the hope they will improve their problems.

Some facilities request parents/guardians to sign a contract for their minor child's treatment authorizing its staff to take any actions deemed necessary, in the child's health, welfare and progress in the child's program. The facilities can be located in relatively remote areas, restrict the child's contact with the outside world, and employ a system of graduated levels of earned privileges and punishment for behavior change. The minor child's communication privileges may also be limited.

The Department of State has no authority to regulate these entities, whether they are private or state-owned, and information about their corporate or legal structures or their relationships to each other or to organizations in the host country where the facility is located is solely responsible for compliance with any local safety, health, sanitation, educational laws and regulations, including all licensing requirements of the staff in that country. These standards are strictly enforced or meet the standards of similar facilities in the United States. The Department of State has, at various times, received complaints about nutrition, housing, education, health issues, and methods of punishment used at some facilities.

Prior to enrolling their minor children in such overseas "Behavior Modification Facilities," the Department of State recommends parents/guardians visit the facility and thoroughly inform themselves about both the facility and the rules governing it and its employees. The Department of State also encourages parents/guardians and facility administrators to ensure that all U.S. citizen enrollees are registered with the nearest U.S. Embassy/Consulate in case emergency assistance is needed.

U.S. consular officials are not qualified to determine whether the programs offered by the facilities are of therapeutic benefit to enrollees. When aware of such facilities, U.S. consular officials conduct periodic facility visits, sometimes accompanied by host country officials, to monitor the general welfare of the U.S. citizen enrollees. Inquiries into the welfare and whereabouts of U.S. citizen enrollees may be initiated by contacting the closest U.S. Embassy/Consulate in the host country or the Department of State's Overseas Citizens Services (OCS) office at the below telephone number. Also, parents may contact the closest U.S. Embassy/Consulate in the host country to inquire about the facility or speak to the Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs' OCS Specialist for that country (Tel.: 202-647-5226 or, for after hours emergencies, 202-647-5225).

The Federal Privacy Act protects U.S. citizens, including minor children, from the unauthorized disclosure of information collected and maintained about them unless the U.S. citizen has consented in writing to the disclosure of the information or one of the Privacy Act's "conditions of disclosure" permits the U.S. Government to release the information.

While parents/guardians may at times act in loco parentis for their minor children and obtain information that is otherwise protected by the Privacy Act, it must also be noted that minor children's explicit wishes must be respected. Thus, a U.S. citizen has been advised by a minor child that s/he does not want any information released to an inquiring parent/guardian without those wishes absent the presence of circumstances affecting the health or safety of the minor child (i.e., one of the "conditions of disclosure"). Parents/guardians should be aware that U.S. citizens 14 years of age and older have the right to apply for passport without their parents'/guardian's permission. In extreme emergency situations, they may also request repatriation of the U.S. Government without parental consent.

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