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432 Custody Case SCS 27/2
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February 2, 1978

The Honorable Secretary of State
State Department
Washington, D.C. 20520

Re: John Stoen
Georgetown
Guyana.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/HR	
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Dear Secretary Vance:

I write out of urgent concern for the welfare of a six year old child, John Stoen. This child is being detained in Guyana, contrary to the wishes of his parents and legal custodians, Timothy and Grace Stoen, all of whom are citizens of the United States.

The child is being kept in Guyana through the efforts of the Reverend James W. Jones, and is being used as a hostage, in effect, by Mr. Jones in a conflict between Mr. Jones and the parents.

You need to know that Mr. Jones is a self-expatriated leader of a religious movement in the United States which generated the fanatical commitment of thousands of persons, including the admiration of a number of popular political leaders. Though that movement was related to the religious body of which I am a part, it now is clear that the trust which so many gave to Mr. Jones so unwisely was tragically misplaced. Many of his most devoted followers have discovered him to be manipulative, coercive, and deeply vindictive, while still wanting to see many persons to be credible and charismatic. Mr. Jones is, in short, a beguiling individual who is apparently capable of wreaking havoc with people's lives.

The sole reason it is important to Mr. Jones to keep John Stoen in Guyana is that John's parents have both "defected" from the church which Mr. Jones leads. Not only has Mr. Jones acquired the properties and assets of many of his followers, fleeing this country with those riches; at least in this instance, he even has a child of two of his disillusioned devotees.

Having some personal knowledge of both Mr. Jones and of Mr. Stoen, I implore the intervention of the just powers of our country to enable the re-uniting of John Stoen with his

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Leon Miller
Executive Minister

W.B. Howton
President

SECRET

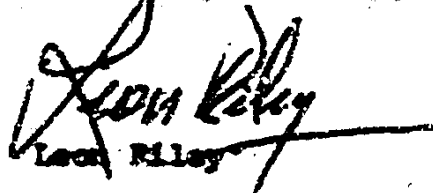
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parents. Knowing both men, I know that any claim of James W. Jones must be given very close scrutiny, for he would deny the common human rights of those who are no longer faithful to him.

Though I trust that your Department has adequate information on this case, I would be pleased to seek to see that you receive any data which you need.

I anticipate that your Department will be unwavering in its efforts until young John has been returned safely to his parents.

Yours very sincerely,


Leon Riley

SECRET



DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D. C. 20520

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Dear Reverend Riley:

The Secretary has asked that I respond to your letter of February 2 concerning the case of John Victor Stoen, currently the subject of a custody dispute in Guyana. Similar expressions of interest have been received from several members of Congress.

While we in the Department of State sympathize very much with Mr. and Mrs. Stoen in their efforts to regain custody of their son, regrettably there is little we can do to be of assistance. Neither the Department of State nor the courts of the State of California have the authority to enforce a U.S. court decision concerning the custody of John Victor as long as he is physically located outside of the United States. Child custody orders issued in the United States are normally not accepted for enforcement in another country on the basis of comity. While any American custody decision might be given evidentiary weight in the Guyanese proceeding, by no means will it be binding on that court.

Since the initiation of the custody suit in Georgetown last August, the Department of State and our Embassy in Guyana have been in close contact with the Stoens and their attorneys, both American and Guyanese. The Embassy has attended all court proceedings, when permitted to attend, and has assisted the Stoens in gaining access to Guyanese government officials. The Embassy has regularly had conversations with the opposing attorneys and has spoken with Mr. Jim Jones, the head of the People's Temple. As Mr. Jones is also an American citizen and entitled to the same rights and protection as Mr. and Mrs. Stoen, the Embassy has been careful to avoid prejudicing the outcome of the dispute. It is the Embassy's policy to remain neutral in this matter.

The Reverend
Leon Riley,
700 S. Ridgeland Avenue,
Oak Park, Illinois 60304

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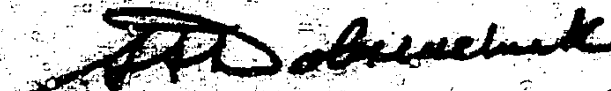
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responsibility to seek to ensure that the judicial outcome of the dispute results from a fair and impartial determination of the merits of the case, and all of our efforts are so directed.

Following a hearing held on January 10, Mr. Steen's attorney stated that he anticipated a favorable decision at the conclusion of the proceedings. Mr. Steen himself was guardedly optimistic in conversations with officers at the Department of State on January 27.

Should you require further information, please contact Miss Elizabeth A. Powers, in our Office of Special Consular Services, Telephone 202-632-3015.

Sincerely yours,



Stephen A. Dobrenchuk
Chief
Emergency and Protection
Services Division