

STATEMENT FROM KEN THOMPSON

Thank you all for attending. I am indebted to the media and my many supporters here and around the world for the success of my three-year quest to find my son and bring him home.

I know you are all interested in hearing about what has happened since Andrew was found in The Netherlands in September last year. Due to my undertaking to the Dutch Courts and restrictions imposed by the Family Court of Australia now that we are back in Australia I am unable to give you a lot of information.

What I can say is this:

Andrew was found whilst attending a school in Amsterdam on 6 September last year when an alert teacher became suspicious and entered the words "Missing child Australia" into Google. She quickly discovered Andrew's website and was assured by the extensive media reports that were posted there that the Dutch authorities needed to be alerted immediately. The authorities and Interpol acted very quickly and from that date until 5 December 2010 he was cared for in a Dutch Child Protection facility.

In May 2008, following his abduction on 24 April 2008, I made an application under the Hague Convention to have Andrew returned to Australia. However, his location was unknown for over two years. Once he was discovered in The Netherlands the application could progress. My application was eventually heard on 30 November 2010 by five judges at the District Court in The Hague who ordered his speedy return. That decision was appealed and the appeal was heard on 13 January 2011 by four different judges at the Amsterdam Court of Appeal. This court upheld the original decision and ordered that Andrew was to be returned to Australia with me no later than 25 January 2011.

Between the date Andrew was found and 5 December 2010 I visited him regularly under the professional guidance of Dutch child protection counsellors. Gradually, we re-established our previously warm and loving relationship. On 6 December 2010 Andrew was released into my care until travel preparations could be made. We spent our first Christmas together for three years.

Once I had the necessary travel documents, Andrew and I left The Netherlands on 18 January 2011 and returned to Australia on 24 January 2011.

That is all I can say about Andrew, now or in the future.

I would like to thank all the thousands of people and the many government agencies and missing children organisations around the world who supported me in my global search for my son, which I have been told is the biggest successful international search for a missing person ever mounted. I am not a wealthy man but I can ride a bike. So instead of chartering a jet and searching the world, I took my bike to Europe and started pedalling. I carried Andrew's favourite soft toy on my handlebars. I prayed someone would recognise his face on my cycling shirt or his web page. Someone did.

I would like to say something about the international legal mechanism, known as the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction that ensured that Andrew would return home.

The Hague Convention is often the only hope for left-behind parents when their child or children have been abducted across international borders. It is also the only legal mechanism to enable abducted children to be returned. The Australian Attorney General 's office, which is the first call in activating a Hague Convention application receives reports of about 150 children a year being abducted overseas by a parent, without the consent or knowledge of the left-behind parent. This means that EVERY YEAR, at least three Australian families EVERY WEEK are going through the pain and loss that Andrew and I experienced. The scale of the problem at the international level is measured in thousands of children every year and these figures are increasing.

This problem is compounded in Australia because unless parenting matters are before the courts International Parental Child Abduction is not a criminal offence in this country. This creates enormous difficulties for parents of abducted children, because Australian agencies are not automatically empowered to carry out investigations within Australia that could lead to the location of their children. Often, the parent whose child has been abducted has to try to pick up the investigative threads themselves while bearing the enormous financial and emotional costs associated with locating their children.

This situation needs to change and requests have been made to the Attorney-General by myself, several law reform associations, parenting groups, and missing children organisations asking that the Australian Government seriously reconsiders its position about criminalisation of this heinous act, which amounts to child abuse.

To make matters worse, it is not known how many more international parental child abductions from Australia go unreported or how many children are taken to countries that are not signatories to The Convention. It is suspected that the numbers are at least equal to those cases that are reported to the authorities.

Although there were some difficulties, The Hague Convention was successfully applied in Andrew's case. However, one concern held by myself and many other parents around the world is that The Convention, ratified in 1984, has not kept pace with international social , cultural, and political changes and that its ability to return children who have been abducted is being adversely affected by these changes. We are also concerned that there are still many countries that are not signatories to The Convention. Governments around the world owe it to our children to make sure the Convention is updated as quickly as possible to reflect these changes to make sure it retains its original intent to return abducted children to their countries of habitual residence as quickly as possible, and to ensure that as many countries as possible sign-up to The Convention to increase the likelihood of these children being returned.

*I am now calling on the Australian Government to play a key role in having the Convention reviewed to better reflect today's world and to encourage as many countries as possible to become signatories to the Convention. This will increase the likelihood of abducted children being located and returned as quickly as possible. I am also asking that the Australian Government carries out an urgent review of its position about the criminalisation of International Parental Child Abduction.*

Andrew's international plight has now come to an end and the Australian media was instrumental in making that happen, along with their colleagues in many other countries. However, I would now like to ask the national and international media to please respect Andrew's privacy and give him a chance to be a normal little Aussie boy once more.

Thank you for coming.