

Visa laws fail to land at ORT

ILANIT CHERNICK AND BARBARA COLE

ALTHOUGH the minister of Home Affairs vowed the new immigration regulations would be in place today, his officials appear not to have taken heed.

This morning The Star visited OR Tambo to find travellers walking through customs without being asked for unabridged birth certificates for their children.

Vivian and Lynne Alexander came from Israel with their 19-month-old son, arriving this morning on an overnight flight as SA citizens. They were not asked for an unabridged birth certificate despite having the document.

Mayihlome Tshwete, spokesman for the Department of Home Affairs, could not comment on why officials were not asking for the unabridged certificates.

Home Affairs has assured prospective adoptive parents that the visa regulations won't hinder intercountry adoptions.

Up until two weeks ago, the regulations were a concern for overseas parents wanting to adopt South African children.

"Adoptions have already been decreasing. When we first heard about this regulation in September last year, we were told by Home Affairs there'd be no exceptions," said Katinka Pieterse, programme director at Abba Adoptions and Social Services.

Pieterse told The Star the visa regulations would delay the intercountry process of adoption causing parents coming from overseas to be stuck in South Africa for over a year because of all the red tape surrounding the new regulations.

"It takes months for international parents to adopt and this

Parents not asked for kids' unabridged birth certificates

would prolong this because of amendment processes, court orders and getting hold of unabridged birth certificates," said Pieterse.

"We have 250 adoptions a year and we understood that if some sort of easier process was not put in place, it would deter intercountry adoptions from taking place."

Pieterse said there was a concern about children born in illegal clinics, who were abandoned and didn't have birth certificates.

"It's something we are addressing so these children can be adopted locally or internationally."

But two weeks ago, Home Affairs came up with a standard operating procedure that should keep the international adoption process to a few months.

This procedure includes a final order of adoption from the registrar, the unabridged birth certificate with the names of the adoptive parents and a court order confirming the adoption.

Still, Naess believes the regulations may protect children if implemented correctly. "If this new law works properly, it will prevent child trafficking," said Pieterse.

Meanwhile, Minister in the Presidency Jeff Radebe told the World Economic Forum on Friday

that the government was considering reviewing the regulations.

"They have had an unintended consequence, which needs to be addressed," he said, according to today's Business Report.

David Frost, chief executive of the Southern Africa Tourism Services Association (Satsa), said yesterday the impact could already be seen in the 20 percent drop in bookings for this month. "We are going to take big hits," he predicted.

Satsa, along with the Southern African Travel Agents (Asata) and the Board of Airline Representatives South Africa, said last week that from May to December last year, the country had lost 66 000 foreign tourists as a result of the pending regulations.

"The total direct, indirect and induced impact on the economy in 2014 was a negative R2.6 billion and a potential loss of more than 5 800 jobs," they said.

The number of foreign tourists who decide not to travel to South Africa this year could increase to 100 000, with a direct tourism spend of R1.4bn, while the total net loss to the GDP could be about R4.1bn.

And 9 300 jobs could be axed. The outbound industry is also set to lose at least R8 million, with further job losses likely.

Otto de Vries, the chief executive of Asata, said the industry was "expecting chaos".

Air China has cancelled its planned direct flights here.

A survey carried out by The Telegraph in the UK found most people (61 percent) who took part in the poll would not visit South Africa because of the regulations.

James Vos, the DA's spokesman on tourism, described Malusi Gigaba, Home Affairs Minister, and Derek Hanekom, Tourism Minister, as "tourism terminators".

Home Affairs says the regulations are in line with an international obligation to curb child trafficking, saying about 30 000 minors are trafficked through South Africa each year.

But the industry claims this figure is a myth. It came from Operation Mobilisation, an NGO, which has said it was misquoted.



CHAMPION: Caroline Wostmann crosses the line during the Comrades in Durban yesterday. It is the first time in 16 years that a South African has won the women's race. **PICTURE:** GALLO IMAGES

Comrades Caroline does Jozi proud

SHAIN GERMANER, SHARIKA AND NOKUTHULA INTOLI

COMRADES Marathon winner Caroline Wostmann may have been the first South African winner in her category in the past 16 years, but the humble 32-year-old believes it was the support of those around her that helped her clinch the victory.

A Wits University lecturer, Wostmann dethroned Russian twins Elena and Olesya Nurgalieva's hopes of dominating the race once again. Wostmann also took first place at the Two Oceans Marathon in April this year, becoming the first South African to win in 14 years.

"I really had an incredible year; no injuries, no setbacks and my training was on track," she said.

After finishing sixth last year, Wostmann was determined to win the Comrades.

The mother of two had juggled training, work and spending time with her family.

Excitement mounted when she crossed the finish line to rapturous applause and ecstatic cheers.

On her Twitter account she said: "Finally got my phone back. What an incredible day! Thx for all the supportive messages and congrats to all who conquered @ComradesRace today."

She thanked her coach, Lindsey Parry who she said helped bring the "ladies' race back to South Africa with position 1 and 2".

Wostmann also praised the organisers of the race: "Thank you @ComradesRace for again uniting South Africa and putting together a superb incredibly well organized event".

But most of all, she thanked her family for allowing her the time to train and reach her dream of winning.

"And finally thank you to my amazing husband."



PREPARED: Vivian and Lynne Alexander arrive at OR Tambo this morning with their baby. They were not asked for an unabridged birth certificate by customs, despite having the document. **PICTURE:** BOYER NGWENYA

