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March 07, 2010

Rabbi Ezra Cohen

To: The British High Court

RE: the Abduction of Alessia Sofia-Cohen Hermer

To whom it may concern:

As one of Barton Hermer's Rabbis and a very dear friend, it is with great sadness to have witnessed his recent chain of events. I have known Mr. Hermer for 8 years and find him to be a wonderful person and a spiritual inspiration to many regarding his faith and family values. It was such a joy to see him so happy with someone he truly loved and to be enjoying fatherhood. I missed him when he and his family moved to Dallas.

Mr. Hermer came as a guest in my home from December 1, 2009 until the first or second week of January 2010. After being denied entry into the UK during their vacation, he had been staying with another friend in Queens before coming to my home to be closer to the city while interviewing. Barton, like many of our congregants, had lost employment during our recent recession; in fact we have several still looking for work. We passed his information throughout the community in an effort to help bring his family home but there just were not many opportunities. His family was his motivation. He actually carried his child's pacifier in his pocket at all times; it was quite touching. I'd see it on the coffee table when I left each morning.

During his time here, I witnessed him regularly on Skype with his fiancé and baby daughter; he missed them beyond words. He always remained upbeat; assuring her he was getting closer to bringing them back home. I can assure your court that through our private discussions, by the interviews he was scheduling in the States and more importantly by hearing several discussions with his fiancé; it was crystal clear and well known that their goal was to live in the United States. In fact, several of the companies we had sent Barton to for interviews were in New York and New Jersey.

The turning point of that goal occurred when Barton returned from London during a break from Christmas to New Years. I will never forget that conversation. I had been out of town myself conducting a wedding on the West Coast. He had called several times trying to reach me and sounded extremely upset on my voicemail. When I returned home he confided in me that while in London, he had discovered his fiancé was having an inappropriate relationship with her stepfather and taking heroin with him and her mother. I was speechless. I asked if he had confronted her, he said she had sworn on their daughter's life of her innocence and asked him not to give up on her. He honestly tried to hold truth in that reply. Days after his return, he was completely broken and horrified for his daughter's safety as she had not replied to any of his attempts to reach her.

A few days after his return, she had finally sent him an email that their relationship was over and that they would not be returning. I have never seen Barton so upset. It has forever changed his personality.

As his friend and his rabbi, he looked to me for answers of why and how such a horrible thing can happen to a man who loves his family so much. Being a Rabbi comes with many wonderful blessings, but there are times like these when we are left speechless as to the will of man.

I hope that I may have helped to shed light upon the true events surrounding Mr. Hermer's visit to the United Kingdom, his character, his motivation and the unfortunate chain of events that led to the retention of his family in England. I pray that it is in your courts best interest to return Mr. Hermer's daughter to their home in Texas.

Respectfully,



Rabbi Ezra M. Cohen  
Director, West Side  
Manhattan Jewish Experience