

U.S. Couple Released by Qatar in Child's Death Celebrate Their Return

An American couple convicted and later cleared in Qatar of wrongdoing in the death of their adopted African-born daughter celebrated their return to Los Angeles with a jubilant church service on Sunday morning.

When the pastor announced the arrival of Matthew and Grace Huang, along with their children, Josiah and Emmanuel, the congregation of 3,000 people applauded and cheered.

Standing with his family at the lectern of Lake Avenue Church in Pasadena, California, Matthew Huang addressed the churchgoers, most of whom the couple had not seen since moving to Qatar in 2012.

"We are really excited to be here and worship with you, it's something that we've longed for, for so long," he said. "The situation these past two years has been extremely difficult. Thank you all for your prayers, and your support and your care for us."

The Huangs left the Gulf Arab state of Qatar on Wednesday after the government lifted a travel ban, ending a nearly two-year ordeal.

A website created to publicize the case said the Huangs had moved to so that , a Stanford-trained engineer, could work on a project related to the 2022 World Cup.

The Huangs were arrested in January 2013 after an autopsy found their 8-year-old daughter, Gloria, died of dehydration and cachexia, an irreversible loss of body mass. The couple said Gloria had suffered from malnutrition-related diseases

since they adopted her from Ghana at age 4.

Matthew and Grace had initially been charged with murder in the death and were convicted of lesser child endangerment charges earlier this year in connection with Gloria's death, according to a support website for the family.

U.S. State Department officials had expressed concerns that cultural misunderstandings could have played a role in the couple's prosecution in a country unaccustomed to multiracial families and adoption.

Josiah, 8, and Emmanuel, 11, had been living with grandparents in Los Angeles while their parents were detained.

Senior Pastor Greg Waybright said the church would collect a "benevolence offering" to provide financial support to the family.

"Just two weeks ago, were praying ... that by Christmas, we'd have some of our family members back home, and it looked absolutely impossible," he said. "I either want to weep or to dance."

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