

Ninety Days to Identify Orphans

A U.S. District judge yesterday gave the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service 90 days to investigate the status and true identities of 2000 Vietnamese children brought into the United States last April.

The government service had previously tried to back out of an agreement to conduct the investigations, but yesterday one of its officials told Judge Spencer Williams the service had already developed a plan to do the work.

Williams ordered the service to send letters to adoptive and foster parents and the appropriate agencies saying that adoptions procedures should be stopped until the investigation is complete.

The suit before Williams was brought by various groups and individuals who claimed the orphans had been "kidnaped from their homeland."

The judge declined to issue a court order halting adoptions, as the plaintiffs asked, but agreed to the plan submitted by John E. Matson, assistant commissioner for investigation within the service.

Matson testified that if the service learns within a short time that a child is not an orphan, "we will initiate the return immediately. However, he added, "there must be a parent who wants him back."

At the end of the three-month investigation period, Williams said, the orphans' records must be turned over to him. He will then decide whether any of the records should be made available to the plaintiffs.