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Father locked in bitter two-year custody battle with his ex-wife after she abducted their son and took him to live with her ‘wealthy and powerful’ family in Brazil

Chris Brann was divorcing estranged wife Marcelle Guimaraes back in 2013 – He says the pair shared custody of son Nico, and had agreed to keep doing so – But in July Guimaraes took Nico to Brazil for a wedding and never returned – Despite courts agreeing that Nico was taken illegally, he is still in Brazil – Brann is calling on President Obama to intervene and help bring Nico home

By Chris Pleasance

A loving father whose son was abducted by his ex-wife and taken to her home country of Brazil two and a half years ago is calling on President Barack Obama to intervene and help get the boy back.

Chris Brann last saw son Nico at his house in Houston, Texas, back in 2013 just before his then-wife Marcelle Guimaraes took the then-four-year-old to Brazil on the pretense of a family wedding.

Despite making her sign a court order compelling her to return, Brann says Guimaraes has never set foot on American soil since, and has kept Nico with her in the city of Salvador, with her family.

Writing an op-ed for the Washington Post today, Brann describes how he and Guimaraes were already estranged at the time she fled to South America, and had filed for divorce.

Speaking to Dailymail.com, he said: 'We separated in February 2012 and she filed for divorce six months later.

'The split was initially agreeable so at that time we signed a voluntary agreement over joint custody, and she actually suggested that we go through a mediation.

'After that everything broke down because she said she wanted to move back to Brazil and take Nico with her, and I said I didn't think that was in his best interests.

'The courts actually agreed with me because they said it would be dangerous and harmful to take my son away from me because we had such a close bond.'

A few months after the mediation, Brann says Guimaraes fired her attorney, revoked their previous agreement, and tried to get sole custody of Nico.

But within a matter of weeks she had relented again, agreeing to go back to their previous custody arrangement, splitting Nico's time between them in Texas.

It was around this time the Brann believes Guimaraes began plotting to illegally take Nico to Brazil in order to start a new life there.

Months before announcing her wedding trip, and signing the travel order, Brann says Guimaraes found herself a job in Salvador and even enrolled Nico in a primary school.

Immediately after landing in Brazil, and without Brann's knowledge, she applied for sole custody of Nico, saying Brann was physically and mentally ill, and therefore incapable of coming to court.

A judge granted her sole custody of the boy without Brann ever being informed that the papers had been filed, he says. Guimaraes also made no mention of the travel papers filed back in Texas.

Unaware at the time that any of this was happening, Brann waited and waited for Guimaraes and Nico to return, but eventually decided to get lawyers involved, who confirmed his worst fears.

It was after finding out these details that Brann's legal battle to get his son back began.

According to a fundraising page launched at the time, Brann had to take on U.S., International, Appellate, Brazilian, and Amicus attorneys at a cost of hundreds of thousands of dollars.

The lawyers went to work, arguing that Guimaraes doctored documents in order to conceal a premeditated abduction attempt, and lied to officials about her intentions.

CBS News reports that a breakthrough came last year when courts in both Texas and Brazil ruled that Nico had been illegally taken out of the country.

However, joy quickly turned to dismay as, despite the ruling, the Brazilian judge ruled that Nico should be allowed to stay in the country, saying he is 'well settled'.

In a Facebook post, Brann said: 'Despite eight independent experts in Brazil and the US recognizing that I am an excellent father and agreeing that my ex-wife illicitly removed Nico from his home, the Federal judge denied Nico's return home and honored the State court's decisions on matters of custody.

'After almost two and a half years, the State court judge has yet to hold a hearing to even meet me and has ignored over 20 petitions to recognize my rights as a father in the last year alone-allowing me sparse visitations dictated by my ex-wife's family under armed guard.'

Back in Texas, Brann says he was allowed to see his son 50 per cent of the time, but is now forced to take trips to Salvador once every eight weeks.

Even then, he is only allowed to see the boy for an afternoon after school before returning the boy to his ex-wife's family.

Jared Gesner, attorney for Brann, says he has now filed a petition to have Nico returned under the Hague Convention, which says custody of a child can only be decided in that child's home country.

However, for this action to succeed, Brann says it will likely require President Obama to speak with Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff.

Obama has intervened in a similar case before, that of David Goldman, an American who fought for five years to bring his son home from Brazil.

Brann said that Goldman's case gives him hope, however remote, that he will see Nico back on American soil again.

He added: 'He needs to come home. It's been two years. [My] house is like a mausoleum to him. Everything reminds me of him. But I will never give up.'

Guimaraes' legal team say that, due to privacy concerns, they cannot comment on the case.

The State Department it is working with the Brazilian family and has repeatedly rebuked Brazil for not meeting its Hague Convention obligations.

Brann said: 'This is about Nico's God-given right to have two parents in his life. Even after everything she's done, the horrible, horrible pain she's put me through, I still only want joint custody.'

'A child loves his mother unconditionally, and so Nico should be able to have Marcelle in his life, but I have a right to have Nico in my life too.'