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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO ALL DIPLOMATIC AND CONSULAR POSTS PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY KINSHASA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY ALMA ATA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY BISHKEK PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY MINSK PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY YEREVAN PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY FREETOWN PRIORITY

UNCLAS STATE 234014

INFORM CONSULS; FOR AMBASSADOR FROM UNDERSECRETARY FOR
MANAGEMENT

E.O. 12356: N/A

TAGS: CASC

SUBJECT: NEW DEPARTMENT OF STATE TRAVEL ADVISORY SYSTEM

1. Summary: On May 22 Mr. Eagleburger approved a new travel advisory system for the Department. A lot of hard work went into designing this new system and I now ask your cooperation in making the new program work. I also request that each CM take steps to inform your host government of the new program and to thoroughly discuss the new program with your country team. End Summary.

2. As you know, the Bureau of Consular Affairs has long provided information to the American traveling public in the form of travel advisories. This is an extremely important discretionary activity undertaken as part of the Department's consular responsibilities for assisting U.S. citizens overseas. In an effort to improve this service I have worked closely with Betty Tamosi to design a new travel advisory system. On May 22 Mr. Eagleburger approved the new system. The revised program will be simpler (we hope) and more useful to the public. I ask for your full cooperation to ensure it is successfully implemented on a timely basis.

3. Essentially the new system will pare the three general categories of travel advisories -- warnings, cautions, and notices -- down to two, Travel Warnings and Consular Information

Sheets. Warnings will be issued only when we recommend avoidance of travel to a certain country when a situation is so dangerous or unstable that a U.S. citizen is likely to be adversely affected by travel to that country and the U.S. Government's ability to assist that citizen is severely constrained as in the case of an embassy drawdown or closure. Cautions and notices will be consolidated into the new Consular Information Sheets. The information sheets will provide factual information on every country.

4. Consular Information Sheets will include such information as the location of the U.S. embassy or consulate in the subject country, unusual immigration practices, health conditions, minor political disturbances, unusual currency and entry regulations, crime and security information (including terrorist incidents), drug penalties and areas of instability. Countries for which deferral of travel is recommended will have Travel Warnings as well as Consular Information Sheets.

5. If an unstable situation in a country does not warrant a warning, we would appropriately and factually include a description of the unstable area in an information sheet. Thus, it provides the public with the same degree of information but with greater consistency to enable them to make an informed decision about travel plans to a country or portion thereof. On limited occasions and to avoid a double standard we will restate in the information sheet any embassy security advice given to official employees.

6. I expect this system to be implemented in a manner consistent with the Department's "no double standard" policy, under which we do not disseminate important security information to only selective potential travelers when the information is relevant to a broader group. All Department personnel involved in implementing the system should be aware that this policy has a statutory basis, in that we are prohibited by law from notifying a civil aviation threat to only selective potential travelers, unless the threat applies only to them. This mandate reflects strong concern that the Government should not protect U.S. Government employees without similarly protecting U.S. citizens subject to the same threat. The "no double standard" rule accordingly is now applied by the Department to all threat notifications, not just to those involving civil aviation. The Department will adhere strictly to this policy in implementing the new travel advisory system. Thus, if an embassy is giving important security advice to its employees, this information will be quoted in the information sheets unless it clearly is relevant only to Government employees.

7. CA will soon be developing Consular Information Sheets following a standardized format. Any travel advisory notice or caution under the existing system will be cancelled when the new Information Sheet is issued. The new system and the old system will run parallel until all Information Sheets are issued on a bureau by bureau basis. Because of the enormous task involved, the information sheets will be written in segments beginning with EUR which has the highest number of American tourists and residents. Following EUR, CA will write the Information Sheets for ARA, EAP, AF and NEA. As each Information Sheet is written it will be cleared with the relevant regional bureau and the pertinent post (embassy).

8. P will authorize all warnings. Should disagreements arise on the information sheets, they will go to M for resolution.

9. It is envisaged that the new system will be in place and actively serving the public by the end of this calendar year.

10. I am encouraged by this new system. It will strengthen the travel information program and provide many benefits. The worldwide coverage of information sheets will be comprehensive and will enable the American public to make better educated decisions about foreign travel.

11. I ask that each of you extend your full cooperation to CA to ensure that the new system we have designed becomes a viable program as soon as possible.

12. Please draw on the following talking points to brief appropriate host government officials:

– The Department of State has made a major revision to its travel advisory program. The new program is designed to expand the type of information distributed to U.S. citizens traveling and residing abroad and make it more understandable. The revised program will simplify and consolidate travel information.

– The new system will pare the three general categories of travel advisories – warnings, cautions, and notices – down to two – travel warnings and consular information sheets. Warnings will be issued when the Department is recommending that Americans defer travel to a particular country. Information now in travel advisory cautions and notices that alert travelers about potential security or health risks will be incorporated into newly created Consular Information Sheets.

– Consular Information Sheets will be available for every country in the world. They will include such information as location of the U.S. embassy or consulate in the subject country, unusual immigration practices, health conditions, minor political disturbances, unusual currency and entry regulations, crime and security information, drug penalties and unstable areas.

– Countries for which deferral of travel is recommended will have Travel Warnings as well as Consular Information Sheets.

– The Department of State believes this expanded program will better serve the American public. It will cover all countries around the world and will be more understandable. We have found that under the three-tier system, warnings, cautions, and notices tend to be given the same weight by the traveling public. The revised system will make it easier for the American public to make decisions about their travel plans.

13. Any follow up questions and comments should be directed to CA A/S Tamposi.

EAGLEBURGER

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