

# American Citizen Services Information Handbook

The American Embassy in Kinshasa serves American citizens visiting or living in both the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville); the full range of consular services is provided. This information sheet outlines the services commonly requested and how to access them.

## **CONSULAR SECTION CONTACT INFORMATION**

### Business Hours and Location:

Monday through Thursday, 0800 – 1700; Friday 0800 – 1200  
Ave. des Aviateurs, No. 310 Gombe, Kinshasa, DRC

The Consular section is on the Embassy compound, across from St. Anne's Residence.

### Mailing address:

(U.S.) 2220 Kinshasa Place, Washington, DC 20521-2220  
(DRC) PO Box 697, Kinshasa/Gombe

Telephone inquiries may be made during regular business hours:

|                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Consular section main number: | 081 884-6859                              |
| American Citizen Services:    | 081 884-4609                              |
| Non-Immigrant Visa:           | 081 880-3724 (Mon.-Thurs. 1300-1500 only) |
| Immigrant Visa Inquiries:     | 081 880-5847 (Mon only between 1500-1700) |

### Fax:

081 301-0560

Email: [AEKinshasaConsular@state.gov](mailto:AEKinshasaConsular@state.gov) (for visa and general inquiries, correspondence)

Website: <http://Kinshasa.usembassy.gov> (for up to date information of general interest)

American citizens seeking American citizen services may access the Consular section during normal business hours; presentation of your passport will facilitate your entry into the reception area. For routine services, we recommend that you call or visit in the afternoons Monday- Thursday as morning hours are dedicated for visa processing and the waiting time to receive American citizen services might be lengthy. American citizens inquiring into visa matters for friends and/or family are requested to utilize the inquiry systems noted above in order to obtain the best possible service.

Based on the local situation, the Department of State continues to warn U.S. Citizens against travel to the Democratic Republic of Congo. U.S. Citizens who chose to ignore this warning need to understand their role in their own personal safety and well being while in the DRC. To access the most current Travel Warning, log on to <http://travel.state.gov>.

## **Emergency contact information**

The Embassy is staffed 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. In case of an after-hours emergency (arrest, robbery, accident, death, similar life or health safety emergency), calls may be made to 081- 225-5872 (CALL U.S.A). The Embassy duty officer will provide assistance and contact necessary embassy personnel, including the Consular officer, as needed. Contact may also be made to the warden who can help contact the Embassy.

Two full-time Consular officers staff the Consular section of the American Embassy, Kinshasa, along with one part-time Consular officer who serves Brazzaville, an American Consular Associate and five full-time Congolese Consular staff.

#### **AMERICAN CITIZEN REGISTRATION**

All American citizens traveling or residing in either DRC or Congo are encouraged to register with the Consular section. Through this registration, the Embassy knows more accurately the number and location of Americans in the Consular district should any emergency in the host country arise. It also enables the Consular officer to locate an individual in the event of a family or business emergency in the United States. Additionally, for Americans registered, we can more quickly replace a lost or stolen passport. The information contained on the registration form is protected from disclosure under the provisions of the Privacy Act of 1974; no information will be given out without express written permission.

We do ask, however, that registrants remain responsible for keeping the registration information current. Persons who have moved or are leaving are requested to inform the Consular section so we may maintain the accuracy of our records. American citizens wishing to register with the Embassy online may do so at [www.registration.state.gov](http://www.registration.state.gov) or in person at the Consular section. There is no fee for the registration service.

#### **AMERICAN CITIZEN WARDEN SYSTEM**

All Americans who register participate in this emergency notification system, unless they specifically request otherwise. The Consular district (which is comprised of DRC and Congo-Brazzaville) is divided into several warden zones, most with a warden who participates in the Embassy's radio checks and who has agreed to contact the registrants in their zone in case of emergency. The Embassy communicates significant changes to the local situation using the warden cascade message system. The warden cascade message system primarily uses written warden messages and the radio network to communicate from the Embassy to the wardens to Americans registered in each zone. These warden messages are also posted on the Embassy website: <http://Kinshasa.U.S.embassy.gov>. From time to time the Consular section does supplement warden messages with text messaging to get messages of an immediate nature to American citizens in the DRC. Consular messages originate from only two (2) telephones, 081 710-0061 and 081 710-0197 and/or your warden. Americans are reminded that these text messages are supplemental only and are dependent upon the availability of the cellular network. The volunteer wardens have also agreed to abide by the applicable provisions of the Privacy Act of 1974.

Soon after your registration, you will receive information on the warden in your zone. Please contact your warden and keep them informed as to any changes in your contact information. Remember to also contact the Consular section to register any changes in your contact information – this is your responsibility!

#### **ARREST AND DETENTION**

When you are in a foreign country, you are subject to its laws. If you experience difficulties with local authorities, remember U.S. officials are limited by foreign laws, U.S. regulations

and geography as to what they can do to assist you. The U.S. government has no funds for your legal fees or other related expenses.

Should you find yourself in a dispute that may lead to police or legal action, contact the Consular section. Although Consular officers cannot serve as attorneys or give legal advice, they can provide a list of local attorneys and help you find legal representation. However, neither the Department of State, the Embassy, nor the Consular section assumes any responsibility for the caliber, competence or professionalism of these attorneys. The Consular officer will do everything they can to protect your legitimate interests and ensure that you are not discriminated against under local law. The Consular officer cannot demand the release of prisoners, provide guarantees of their comportment or provide funds for bail. If you are arrested, immediately identify yourself as an American citizen and request that the Consular section be notified. Under international agreement, you have the right to contact the U.S. Consul. If your request is refused, continue to ask, politely, but persistently. If unsuccessful, try to have someone else contact the Consular section on your behalf.

Upon learning of your arrest, a Consular officer will visit you, provide a list of attorneys, and if requested, contact your family or friends in the U.S. or elsewhere. The Consul can assist your family or friends to transfer money that can be used to obtain food and clothing for you. They will also try to get relief if you are held under inhumane or unhealthful conditions or are treated less equitably than others in the same situation. The Consul will monitor your situation and continue to make regular visits throughout the duration of your incarceration.

#### **CONSULAR INFORMATION SHEETS AND TRAVEL WARNINGS**

The responsibility for giving information to the public and U.S. Foreign Service posts on travel to certain countries or areas worldwide is centralized in the Department of State, Office of Overseas Citizens Services. The dissemination of this information abroad is normally the responsibility of the Embassy and/or Consular section. Travel warnings are issued when local conditions such as political unrest or natural disasters or public health concerns are likely to adversely affect traveling U.S. citizens. There is currently a travel warning in effect for DRC serving as a reminder of the need for visitors and residents to exercise caution while in this Consular district.

Consular information sheets usually contain information concerning visa requirements, currency, hotel and other internal travel information, the business climate and general information that is helpful to the traveler or person contemplating travel to a particular country.

Current travel warnings and consular information sheets are available online via the Consular section of the Embassy's webpage at <http://Kinshasa.U.S.embassy.gov> or the State Department's travel website at [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov). Copies are also available by visiting the Consular section during normal business hours.

## **CONSULAR REPORT OF BIRTH ABROAD**

If a child is born abroad to a U.S. citizen parent, the parent should file any “Application for a Consular Report of Birth Abroad” (CRBA), as soon as possible. Documents required for the execution of a CRBA include:

1. A certified copy of the child’s local birth certificate;
2. Proof of U.S. citizenship of parent(s);
3. A certified copy of the parent’s marriage certificate;
4. Statement of Physical Presence, and
5. If a parent was previously married, a certified copy of the parent’s death certificate or divorce decree of the prior spouse.

In cases where the birth is not registered as soon as possible following the birth, additional evidence of relationship may be required; this will be explained at the time of application should it be necessary.

Upon approval of the application, a Certificate of Birth Abroad is issued which resembles a U.S. birth certificate and is issued to the U.S. citizen parent as primary evidence of U.S. citizenship of the child. The Consular section does not retain copies of this record; the document is forwarded to the Department of State in Washington, DC. Replacement copies may be obtained. Please call for further information on applicable fees for CRBA issuance and/or to obtain copies of CRBAs that have been previously issued.

## **CONVOCAION AND SEIZURE OF PROPERTY**

The Embassy continues to receive reports of U.S. citizens being convoked before local authorities or of their property being seized by local authorities. If you are required to appear before local authorities (convoked), you should generally obey the convocation as you are subject to local laws. Wherever the convocation takes place, notify the Consular section giving any information as to why you’ve been convoked, where and by whom and a contact number where you can be reached. If you are unable to notify the Consular section directly, contact someone in the area who can contact the Embassy on your behalf should it be necessary.

If you have property that is seized by local authorities, you may contact the “Office des Biens Mal Acquis” (OBMA) to lodge a complaint. A U.S. Consular officer may not serve as your attorney or intermediary to obtain the return of your property, however the Consul can provide you with a list of local attorneys and make will do their best to make sure you are not discriminated against.

## **DEATH**

The Consular section in Kinshasa is ready to assist in the event of the death of a U.S. citizen in DRC or Congo-Brazzaville. The Consular section has information on mortuaries, local requirements and costs of shipping remains to the U.S. and information on local burial. In the event that the citizen is unattended, a Consular officer will report the death to the next of kin and the Department of State. Once the Consular officer is notified of the wishes of the next of kin, the Consular officer will make the appropriate arrangements for the

disposition of the remains, and the forwarding of personal effects. The Consular officer will also assist with the preparation of the necessary documents.

In all cases, the death of an American citizen, whether resident or tourist should be reported to the Consular section in Kinshasa. Upon completion of all necessary formalities, a "Report of Death Abroad", based on the local death certificate, will be issued and forwarded to the next of kin for use in settling estate matters. There is no charge for the preparation of this report and its transmission to the next of kin. The report is also sent to the Department of State; additional copies may be obtained directly from the Department. Please contact the Consular section for information.

#### **DESTITUTE AMERICANS**

There are generally no U.S. government funds to assist Americans who are temporarily out of money. Individuals are asked to contact family, friends or their employers regarding their financial needs. Consular staff can assist in placing telephone calls to the U.S. to establish contact with someone there. In emergency cases, the Consular officer can assist in the transfer of funds through the Department of State in Washington, DC or with a repatriation loan, to be repaid when the American arrives in the U.S. Western Union facilities are also available in most large cities and towns in the Consular district making the wire transfer of funds from family or friends possible.

#### **ENTERING OR LEAVING THE COUNTRY**

American Citizens must obtain the visas to enter the Consular district (see section on visas) before attempting to enter either the DRC or Congo Brazzaville. "Beach" or border visas have been available in the past, but are no longer available according to the DRC DGM.

The DRC government does not recognize dual citizenship. If a DRC citizen takes up citizenship in another country, they no longer have DRC citizenship. U.S. citizens who still have a DRC passport may not travel into or out of the DRC using their DRC passport and must use their U.S. passport at all times while entering, leaving or identifying themselves in the DRC. Because the former DRC citizen is no longer legally entitled to the DRC passport, they can and have been detained and arrested if they use a DRC passport.

#### **EMERGENCY PLANNING AND EVACUATION**

In the event of an evacuation of DRC or Congo Brazzaville, every effort will be made to contact all American citizens either traveling or residing in the consular district; the warden notification system is the primary means of communication. All U.S. citizens should have their own emergency action plan including an alternate gathering point where you can maintain contact with your warden and the Embassy, ensure that all necessary travel documents are current and accessible, and have an adequate supply of food and water for several days or weeks. During most emergencies, the best initial action is to "stand fast" at home or in another safe location and monitor the media and await news and instructions from the Embassy. It is recommended that your safe location be an internal room. During recent unrest, stray bullets and flying glass killed bystanders when they ran to widows after hearing gunfire.

Should an evacuation become necessary, instructions will be given as to the assembly location(s) as well as additional instructions on how to proceed at that time. There are no guarantees that an evacuation can be safely executed and U.S. government evacuations are not free of cost; those evacuated will be required to sign a promissory note for repayment of evacuation expenses.

It is recommended that all Americans living and traveling in Congo-Kinshasa or Congo-Brazzaville maintain current visas in their passports for neighboring countries to expedite departure from the DRC should an evacuation or other emergency departure be necessary. These visas are the responsibility of the traveler and possessing a current passport with current visas will certainly assist with rapid travel if needed.

The Department of State website [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov) has a wealth of information on emergency preparedness as well as evacuation planning. We encourage you to read information online and have an appropriate emergency plan for you and your family.

#### **FEDERAL BENEFITS ABROAD**

Federal agency benefit checks (Social Security, Office of Personnel Management, Department of Labor, Railroad Retirement, and Veteran's Administration) can be sent from the Department of Treasury to U.S. embassies or consular sections in the countries where the beneficiaries reside. Normally, checks received in this manner are then forwarded via the local mail system. However, because of the unreliability of local mail systems in the DRC and Congo-Brazzaville, checks received here are not mailed. Instead, beneficiaries must present themselves in person to the Consular section to pick up their checks. Additionally, because of past abuses and the responsibility of the Consul to ensure that the beneficiary receives their benefits, it is no longer possible to send a designate to pick up a check. In the event of a medical incapacity of the beneficiary, please contact the consular section to make alternate arrangements.

#### **ILLNESS OR INJURY**

A U.S. citizen who requires medical attention or hospitalization can contact the Consular section for information on available physicians and hospitals. The Consular section cannot recommend any particular doctor or hospital, but can provide a list from which to choose. A Consular officer does visit U.S. citizens who may be in need of assistance and if requested to do so, can also notify family in the United States and communicate any requests for funds from home. The Embassy has no funds to assist with payment of medical expenses for U.S. citizens overseas. We strongly urge American citizens to obtain and maintain their own health care and medical evacuation insurance while in Congo.

#### **LOST OR STOLEN PASSPORTS**

If you believe that your U.S. passport has been lost or stolen, you must notify the Consular section immediately so that you may apply for a replacement passport. In some instances, with prompt notification, we have been able to locate stolen or lost passports with the help of local immigration authorities, airline personnel or other embassies. When applying for a replacement passport, you must provide the Consular section with the details regarding the

loss, copies of appropriate police reports, complete a report of lost or stolen passport and pay applicable passport issuance fees.

### **MARRIAGES**

Consular officers and Ambassadors are not authorized to perform marriage ceremonies.

### **NOTARIAL SERVICES**

A full range of notarial, certification and authentication services are available and are similar to those performed by a notary public in the United States. All notarial, certification and authentication services require payment of fees; please contact the Consular section for fee information.

### **PASSPORT SERVICES**

All U.S. citizens living in the Consular district are requested by the Congolese governments to hold valid U.S. passports. No single document is more important to you as an American traveling or residing overseas. We strongly urge to keep your passport well protected while you are here, and not allow your passport to expire. Except for an extremely limited number of exceptions, all passports are now issued in the United States with an approximate processing time of 10 business days from the acceptance of your application. Passport applications must be submitted in person at the Consular section along with the corresponding fees. Recent changes in federal rules have added a security surcharge to passport processing fees; please call or check online at [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov) for the applicable fees and guidelines concerning passport issuance or renewal.

Passport applicants must appear in person before a Consular officer to apply for a passport. Minor children applying for a passport must also be accompanied to the Consular section by both parents.

The addition of visa pages to valid passports may still be performed at the Consular section; it is usually finished in 24 hours from acceptance of the application. There is no fee for this service.

### **SELECTIVE SERVICE REGISTRATION**

Selective service registration is applicable to all males within 30 days of their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday who are:

1. U.S. Citizens;
2. Aliens residing in the United States;
3. Conditional entrants to the U.S. such as refugees or parolees.

Forms for registration are available in the Consular section and, once completed, will be forwarded for the registrant to the Selective Service System headquarters.

### **TAXES**

U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents living overseas must report their worldwide income on their annual federal income tax returns. The Consular section in Kinshasa receives a supply of federal tax forms each year as well as a CD-rom with downloadable

versions of current and past years' forms. If you need IRS forms, please contact our office and we will assist you with copies. There is no IRS representative assigned to the Embassy, nor is anyone at the Embassy qualified to provide authoritative tax information. If you have specific questions or problems, we recommend that you contact the IRS directly; we can assist you in obtaining contact information. You may also find information on the Internet at [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov).

We do not maintain supplies of tax forms for individual states; however, we will assist you in obtaining contact information for the appropriate state.

### **Town Hall Meetings**

The U.S. Ambassador and the Consular section hold town hall meetings in Kinshasa and Brazzaville on subjects of interest to the resident American citizen community. These meetings are open to all American citizens living or traveling in the DRC or ROC.

### **VISAS**

#### **CONGOLESE VISAS**

The Congolese governments require all U.S. citizens visiting or residing in the DRC or Congo-Brazzaville to have valid Congolese visas in their passports. Detailed information on the types of visas, their length of validity, eligibility as well as application information is available at the Consular section. The Consular section can provide the *Attestation Consulaire* and the *Attestation de Bonne Conduit* for U.S. Citizens to support DRC visa applications. There is no fee for this service and the documents are usually ready within 24 hours.

#### **FOREIGN VISA REQUIREMENTS**

The Consular section maintains copies of a document entitled "Visa Requirements of Foreign Governments" which spells out visa requirements for U.S. citizens as well as immunization requirements for all countries worldwide. This information is also available on the State Department's travel website at [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov).

#### **UNITED STATES VISAS**

Visitor Visas: Non-immigrant and immigrant visas are processed and issued for DRC and Congo-Brazzaville nationals as well as third country nationals living in the consular district. Application forms and instructions for applying for non-immigrant visas are available during normal business hours at the Consular entrance. Information is also available at the Embassy's website: <http://Kinshasa.usembassy.gov>. Appointments are made by contacting the Consular section via telephone (refer to the information on page 1).

Immigrant and Diversity Visas: The Consular section resumed processing of immigrant visas on April 1, 2005. Information on individual petitions and applications may be obtained by calling the office during the hours specified; general information may also be obtained at the Consular entrance during normal business hours as well as on the Embassy's website: <http://Kinshasa.usembassy.gov> or at [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov).



As a general rule, we recommend that if you are contacted about a visa issue that you refer the inquirer to the Consular section where the staff can provide accurate information on visa law, eligibility and application requirements. The consular section does not take walk-in visa inquiries.

#### **VOTING**

The U.S. government has assisted U.S. citizens overseas in voting absentee since 1942. The Secretary of State shares the responsibility with the Secretary of Defense for voter assistance that includes the availability of expedited mail delivery of ballot material. Non-partisan voting information is available at the Consular section in addition to absentee voter guides, applications for absentee ballots and general information on voting eligibility and procedures.

#### **WELFARE AND WHEREABOUTS OF U.S. CITIZENS**

If requested, a Consular officer will make every effort to locate and pass messages to U.S. citizens who are thought to be in the Consular district. This is generally done at the request of a family member in the U.S. Inquirers should be aware, however, that the Privacy Act of 1974 prevents divulging any information regarding another U.S. citizen without the express written permission to do so.

Welfare and whereabouts requests are frequently made on behalf of minor children by divorced or separated parents. The Consular officer cannot take sides in custody disputes, but the Consular officer can attempt to locate children if so requested, and can transmit information regarding the child's health and well being to either parent.

This information was last updated August 25, 2006