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U.S. Department of Homeland Security sent this bulletin at 01/31/2020 05:11 PM EST

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Office of Public Affairs

Raising the Global Travel Security Bar: DHS Announces New Travel Restrictions on Six Countries and Updated Process for Evaluating Foreign Country Compliance

Burma, Eritrea, Kyrgyzstan, Nigeria, Sudan, Tanzania Will Face New Restrictions

WASHINGTON - Today, U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Acting Secretary Chad F. Wolf announced that President Donald J. Trump signed a proclamation, which places new, tailored visa restrictions on six countries that failed to meet a series of security criteria, demonstrating that they could be a risk to the homeland. Acting Secretary Wolf also announced that the Department has updated the methodology it uses to assess compliance with the security criteria established under Executive Order 13780 in 2017. This enhanced review process raises the bar for global security by requiring nations to meet the Department's stronger security standards and by making it clear to countries what they must do to meet those standards. The updated criteria enhance our screening and vetting capabilities and allow DHS to better identify terrorists and criminals attempting to enter the United States.

"The top responsibility of the President and the Department of Homeland Security is the safety and security of the American people, and these new vetting criteria accomplish that goal and are raising the bar for global security," said Acting Secretary Wolf. "It is logical and essential to thoroughly screen and vet everyone seeking to travel or immigrate to the United States. However, there are some countries from whom the U.S. does not receive the necessary information about its travelers and, as a result, pose a national security or public safety risk that warrants tailored travel restrictions."

Wolf continued: "DHS has refined its robust security standards, including enhanced screening and vetting capabilities, that allow us to better identify terrorists and criminals attempting to enter the United States. These screening and vetting capabilities are most effective when foreign governments contribute to our ability to verify a traveler's identity and assess whether they pose a national security or public safety risk. For a small number of countries that lack either the will or the capability to adhere to these criteria, certain travel restrictions have become necessary to mitigate potential threats. The new, additional restrictions are not blanket restrictions. These

tailored restrictions will make the U.S. safer and more secure. And countries that make the necessary improvements will have their restrictions removed accordingly, as was done in 2018.”

About the Refined Methodology

Pursuant to Executive Order 13780, DHS established identity-management, information sharing, national security, and public safety risk criteria all foreign governments are expected to adhere to in order to facilitate accurate and fair admissibility decisions under the Immigration and Nationality Act.

In its most recent review, DHS, in consultation with other departments and agencies, updated the methodology by which it reviews a foreign government’s performance. The update included refining and modifying specific performance metrics for each criteria, collecting additional data on foreign practices, and weighting criteria based on their degree of significance to U.S. national security. For example, DHS now considers whether a foreign government reports lost and stolen passports at least every 30 days, instead of considering whether they have ever shared such information. By reporting regularly, DHS officers can determine passport validity with higher confidence.

These changes give DHS a more detailed picture of a country’s compliance with the individual criteria and to hold them accountable for regular cooperation. In doing so, the updated methodology helps guide U.S. government discussions with foreign governments. Since implementing these measures, the Administration has recorded improvements in identity management and information sharing with multiple foreign governments, and because of this Administration’s actions, our international partners have raised their own baseline requirements.

About the new restrictions

The Acting Secretary, in coordination with the Secretary of State, Attorney General, and Director of National Intelligence has conducted the fourth review required by Proclamation 9645. After further coordination with the other members of the cabinet and the National Security Council, the Acting Secretary submitted his recommendations to the President on September 13, 2019.

The travel restrictions imposed by the President today are tailored to the country-specific deficiencies identified during the review process and an assessment of travel-related risk. The new restrictions imposed by the President are less restrictive than the existing restrictions. Like the seven countries that continue to face travel restrictions pursuant to Proclamation 9645, the six additional countries added for restrictions are among the worst performing in the world; however, there are prospects for near-term improvement for these six countries. Each has a functioning government and each maintains productive relations with the United States. In each case and consistent with those restrictions imposed in 2017, the President has imposed specific travel restrictions to mitigate the risks posed. The restrictions imposed by this proclamation reflect the U.S. government’s greater confidence that these countries can make meaningful improvements in a reasonable period of time.

If that expectation is met, the President may remove travel restrictions at any time. Conversely, the President has also determined that if improvements are not made, additional restrictions may be added. Those travelers who have already been issued visas by the U.S. government will not be affected by the new restrictions.

Newly Imposed Restrictions

Burma: Burma has begun to engage with the United States on a variety of identity-management and information-sharing issues, but it does not comply with the established identity-management and information-sharing criteria assessed by the performance metrics.

Suspension of entry for Immigrants, except as Special Immigrants whose eligibility is based on having provided assistance to the U.S. Government.

Eritrea: Eritrea does not comply with the established identity-management and information-sharing criteria assessed by the performance metrics.

AILA Doc. No. 20013104. (Posted 1/31/20)

Suspension of entry for Immigrants, except as Special Immigrants whose eligibility is based on having provided assistance to the U.S. Government.

Kyrgyzstan: Kyrgyzstan does not comply with the established identity-management and information-sharing criteria assessed by the performance metrics.

Suspension of entry for Immigrants, except as Special Immigrants whose eligibility is based on having provided assistance to the U.S. Government.

Nigeria: Nigeria does not comply with the established identity-management and information-sharing criteria assessed by the performance metrics.

Suspension of entry for Immigrants, except as Special Immigrants whose eligibility is based on having provided assistance to the U.S. Government.

Sudan: Sudan generally does not comply with our identity management performance metrics and presents a high risk, relative to other countries in the world, of terrorist travel to the United States.

Suspension of entry for Diversity Immigrants, as described in section 203(c) of the INA, 8 U.S.C. 1153(c).

Tanzania: Tanzania does not comply with the established identity-management and information-sharing criteria assessed by the performance metrics.

Suspension of entry for Diversity Immigrants, as described in section 203(c) of the INA, 8 U.S.C. 1153(c).

The remarks as prepared can be found here: www.dhs.gov/news/2020/01/31/2020-travelvisa-restrictions

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