

# American Citizen Services Frequently Asked Questions Podcast Transcript

## **Music/Standard Intro:**

This is a U.S. Embassy, Abuja Podcast. For print versions of articles, multimedia, and subscription information, visit <http://nigeria.usembassy.gov>

## **Opening Narration:**

We are here today with our American Citizen Services Officer Marcus. During this interview, he will be discussing with us, some of the services they provide to American Citizens residing in, or traveling to Nigeria. Marcus, thanks a lot for your time, we appreciate your coming in.

## **Marcus:**

Thank you very much for having me, it's my pleasure to be here.

## **What are some of the common types of services the Embassy can provide for me?**

### **We can help:**

- Issue passports
- Issue Reports of Birth and Death Aboard
- Notarize documents
- Replace a stolen passport
- Contact family, friends, or employers on your behalf
- Provide a list of medical care and legal facilities in the area
- Address emergency needs that arise as a result of a crime
- Explain the local criminal justice process

### **We cannot:**

- Investigate crimes
- Provide legal advice or represent you in court
- Serve as official interpreters or translators
- Pay legal, medical, or other fees for you

## **What is the Department of State's role during a crisis overseas? Do you always evacuate U.S. citizens during a crisis overseas?**

The actions we take depend on the nature of the crisis. In some instances, we may only need to provide information on conditions in the country, such as warning about areas of unrest, how and where to seek

help, and other useful advice. In more serious situations, we may recommend that U.S. citizens leave the foreign country, and, if commercial transportation is not available, provide departure assistance, as our resources permit. Rest assured that in case of a crisis, we will make use of all available modes of communication to keep our citizens informed, including the internet, social media, TV, and radio. Regularly scheduled commercial flights or transportation are always the best option when local communications and transportation infrastructure are intact and operating normally, even if we have advised all U.S. citizens to leave. Our efforts are devoted to keeping the local U.S. citizen community informed of developments and travel options.

***Am I required to register with the Embassy? How can I register my presence in Nigeria with the Embassy?***

We encourage all U.S. citizens traveling abroad, especially citizens who plan to be overseas for a significant amount of time, to enroll in the [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#). It is important that you keep your contact information up-to-date so that we can notify you or your designated emergency contact of developments and provide valuable information.

**Stay Informed.**

Sign up for our free [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program](#) (formerly known as “Travel Registration” or “Registration with Embassies”) to receive the latest travel updates and information!

When you sign up, you will automatically receive the most current information we compile about the country where you will be traveling or living. You will also receive updates, including [Travel Warnings](#) and [Travel Alerts](#) (where appropriate). You only need to sign up once, and then you can add and delete trips from your account based on your current travel plans!

**Stay Connected.**

By connecting with us on the [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program](#), we will be able to assist you better in the case of an emergency, such as if you lose your passport or it is stolen while you are abroad.

We also assist U.S. citizens in other emergencies, such as in natural disasters. For example, after the earthquake in Haiti, we evacuated over 16,700 U.S. citizens and family members. During the civil unrest in Lebanon in 2006 we assisted nearly 15,000 U.S. citizens and family members, and in 2004 we helped thousands more during the tsunami.

The travel and contact information you enter into our [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program](#) will make it easier for consular officers in U.S. embassies and consulates around the world to contact you and your loved ones during an emergency—including situations where your family or friends in the U.S. are having problems trying to contact you with important news.

**Stay Safe.**

We believe that a well-informed traveler is a safer traveler. Our consular officers around the world compile [country-specific information](#), [travel alerts](#), [travel warnings](#), fact sheets and emergency messages to provide you with timely and accurate travel information about every country where you may travel. We include reports on possible risks and security threats so that you can make informed decisions about your travel plans and activities.

Stay informed by connecting with us via our [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program](#) so you can have safe and enjoyable travels!

***What type of notices does the U.S. Embassy issue for U.S. citizens visiting or residing in Nigeria?***

We want you to be as prepared as possible before you go. We use a three-tiered system to help you make decisions about where, or sometimes if, to travel.

#### Country Specific Information

We provide [Country Specific Information](#) for every country of the world. For each country, you will find information like the location of the U.S. embassy and any consular offices; whether you need a visa; crime and security information; health and medical conditions; drug penalties; and localized hot spots. This is a good place to start learning about where you are going.

#### Travel Alerts

We issue [Travel Alerts](#) for short-term events we think you should know about when planning travel to a country. Examples of reasons for issuing a Travel Alert might include an election season that is bound to have many strikes, demonstrations, disturbances; a health alert like an outbreak of H1N1; or evidence of an elevated risk of terrorist attacks. When these short-term events are over, we cancel the Travel Alert.

#### Travel Warnings, last one for Nigeria on January 12, 2012

We issue a [Travel Warning](#) when we want you to consider very carefully whether you should go to a country at all. Examples of reasons for issuing a Travel Warning might include unstable government, civil war, or ongoing intense crime or violence, or frequent terrorist attacks. We want you to know the risks of traveling to these places and to strongly consider not going to them at all. Travel Warnings remain in place until the situation changes; some have been in effect for years.

Lastly, we issue -- "Message for U.S. Citizens" will be the label for routine but important messages such as voting news, outreach trip information, or newsletters.

And -- "Emergency Message for U.S. Citizens" will be the label for breaking news messages containing advice for the resident community, such as those alerting U.S. citizens to demonstrations, a political crisis, a natural disaster, or a terrorist attack.

#### *Will you release any of my personal information to others in the case of an emergency or routine service?*

Privacy Act of 1974 – The provisions of the Privacy Act are designed to protect the privacy and rights of Americans, but occasionally they complicate our efforts to assist citizens abroad. As a rule, consular officers may not reveal information regarding an individual American's location, welfare, intentions, or problems to anyone, including family members and Congressional representatives, without the expressed consent of that individual. Although sympathetic to the distress this can cause concerned families, consular officers must comply with the provisions of the Privacy Act. Certain exceptions exist, such as when we need to share information on a limited basis in order to protect your safety and welfare in extreme circumstances.

#### *What Should a U.S. Citizens Do if Their Passport is Lost or Stolen in Nigeria?*

Contact the nearest [U.S. embassy or consulate](#) for assistance. You will need to speak to the American Citizens Services unit of the Consular Section. If you are scheduled to leave the foreign country shortly, please provide the Consular Section with details regarding your departure schedule. Every effort will be made to assist you quickly. You will also be directed to where you can obtain the required passport photos.

If you are notified by a relative or friend that their U.S. passport has been lost/stolen, you may wish to contact Overseas Citizens Services, (202) 647-5225 at the U.S. Department of State in Washington, D.C. providing as much information about possible about the person's who needs passport services abroad.

This will assist us in trying to verify the person's previous passport, clearing the person's name through the Department Passport Name Check System, and relaying this information to the U.S. embassy or consulate. Your relative/friend must apply for a new passport at the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate.

You will need to complete a new **passport application**. The consular officer taking an application for replacement of a lost, stolen, or misplaced passport must be reasonably satisfied as to your identity and citizenship before issuing the replacement. In virtually all cases this can be done through examination of whatever citizenship and identity documents are available, conversations with the applicant, close observation of demeanor and replies to questions asked, and discussions with the applicant's traveling companions or contacts in the United States.

### **Can the U.S. Embassy Issue a Replacement Passport Over a Weekend or Holiday?**

U.S. passports are not routinely issued by U.S. embassies and consulates abroad on weekends and holidays when the embassy/consulate is closed.

### **I live in Nigeria but would like to vote in the upcoming U.S Election. Is this possible? How?**

VOTING- <http://www.fvap.gov/>

Absentee voting is a simple four or five step process.

- You send in a completed Federal Post Card Application to your local election officials
- They confirm your eligibility to vote, and put your name on a list to receive absentee ballots
- They send you a blank absentee ballot by mail and make it available electronically
- You complete the ballot and send it back before the ballot receipt deadline
- If your ballot fails to arrive, use the emergency federal write-in ballot to vote

### **Registration/Absentee Ballot Request**

To vote from abroad, you have to register to vote with local election officials in your state of legal (voting) residence, AND every year you should ask to receive absentee ballots. You can use one form to do both - the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA). Submit a new FPCA every time you move, change your address, change your e-mail, or change your name.

To complete and address the form, go to either the [FVAP.org](http://FVAP.org) or the [Overseas Vote Foundation.org](http://Overseas Vote Foundation.org) websites, where an online assistant walks you through the process. You can also pick up an FPCA and a copy of your state's requirements from any U.S. embassy or consulate, or from many [overseas U.S. citizen civic or political groups](#).

Your state may allow you to submit your FPCA via mail, fax, or e-mail. (See Voting and Returning Your Ballot below for options.) Consult the online [FVAP Voting Assistance Guide](#) for your state's current requirements. If you need help completing or submitting the form, contact the voting assistance officer at

the [closest U.S. embassy or consulate](#), or check additional resources available on the [Federal Voting Assistance Program](#) website.

### **Voting and Returning Your Ballot**

Complete your ballot carefully and legibly, and return it to your local election officials before your state's ballot receipt deadline. Overseas voters have a number of options for returning voted ballots:

- **Local mail** - If you live in an area with efficient mail service to the United States, you can affix sufficient international postage to your ballot envelope and mail it promptly.
- **U.S. Embassy Pouch/Army Postal Service (APO/FPO)** - Official election ballot envelopes that bear postage-paid markings can be returned via U.S. diplomatic pouch or Military Postal Service free of charge. You can also print out and use an envelope with postage-paid markings that is available on the [FVAP web site](#). NOTE: You'll need to submit your ballot in person to your closest U.S. embassy or consulate. Please contact the consular section for specific instructions and hours of availability [in your country](#).
- **Fax, E-mail, or Internet** - A number of states now allow the return of voted ballots via electronic means. Consult the [Federal Voting Assistance Program's Voting Assistance Guide](#) for electronic transmission options for your state.
- **Express Courier Service** - If time is short or local mail is unreliable, you can use professional courier services such as FedEx, DHL, or UPS. Check the [Overseas Vote Foundation website](#) for information about reduced rates for voters. NOTE: FedEx does not deliver to P.O. boxes.
- **Summary of Recent Changes to Absentee Voting**
- New legislation eliminated a requirement for states to send out absentee ballots for successive election cycles based on a single request. To be assured that your request for absentee ballots is current, FVAP urges voters to submit new FPCAs every year. Beginning with the November 2010 general elections, states and territories are now required to send ballots to overseas citizens 45 days before an election except under emergency circumstances. They are also required to make your blank ballot available electronically either by fax, e-mail, or internet download.
- Regulations for overseas voting went into effect in 2010. If you want to be able to vote while you are outside the United States, you should send a completed Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) to your local election officials every year. It's easy to do - just go to [www.FVAP.gov](http://www.FVAP.gov), the official U.S. Government website for overseas absentee voting information, to start the process.
- We strongly recommend you get in the habit of submitting a new FPCA every January to ensure you receive ballots for all the elections in which you are eligible to vote during the calendar year. In addition to the November general elections held every other year, you may be eligible to vote in federal or state primary elections, special elections, emergency elections, and runoff elections.
- **LOOKING FORWARD TO THE 2012 PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY ELECTIONS:** The first presidential primary elections take place in January 2012.

### ***If I am an American citizen and my child is born in Nigeria, can I transfer my U.S. citizenship to them? How?***

Most children born abroad to a U.S. citizen parent or parents acquire U.S. citizenship at birth. As soon as possible after the birth, the U.S. citizen parent should contact the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. If

the consul determines that the child has acquired U.S. citizenship, a consular officer prepares a Consular Report of Birth Abroad of a Citizen of the United States of America (Form FS-240). This document is recognized in the United States as proof of acquisition of U.S. citizenship, and it is acceptable evidence of citizenship for obtaining a passport, entering school, and most other purposes. Failure to document a child promptly as a U.S. citizen may cause hardship for the parents or child later on when attempting to obtain a passport or register for school. For further information, visit the Department of State website at [http://www.travel.state.gov/law/family\\_issues/birth/birth\\_593.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/law/family_issues/birth/birth_593.html).

***How can I get help for a U.S. citizen friend or family member in Nigeria?***

The U.S. Embassy has extensive programs to assist its citizens in Nigeria. Any citizen in need of assistance can call, e-mail or visit the Embassy in Abuja or Consulate in Lagos to request assistance. Unfortunately, most assistance requests that we receive stem from 419 scams, in which people ask online acquaintances to send money to assist them after a robbery, kidnapping, accident, arrest or other such incident. You can read more about this type of scam [here](#). We strongly recommend that you do not send money directly to anybody who you have not met in person. You can refer any citizen in need of help to the Embassy.

***How can I tell if I have become a victim of an Internet Based Crime?***

The U.S. Embassy in Abuja and the U.S. Consulate in Lagos together receive over 4000 inquiries each year from Americans who have encountered internet scams. These scams have evolved over the past 30 years, and some are so advanced that they are difficult to detect. It is not unusual for a scammer to spend months or even years building a relationship before ever asking for money. Luckily, you have many resources available to help you identify and avoid scams and illegal money laundering.

Many of the latest scams involve people who claim to be U.S. citizens who are in Nigeria and in distress. Frequent stories involve robberies, fires, car accidents or delays at the airport by the authorities. Though scammers will claim that they have no other source of help, the U.S. missions in Nigeria are well-equipped to help genuine citizens in an emergency. We also have great relationships with hospitals and police forces in Nigeria, so we receive direct notice of any U.S. citizens that require assistance and work with the authorities to provide that assistance as early as possible. If you're being asked for money to help a U.S. citizen in Nigeria, you can refer that person to the U.S. Embassy or Consulate so that we can assess if their claim is legitimate, and assist them if it is. Please note that scammers will often claim that they have already approached Embassy or Consulate officials, and were either refused assistance or were offered only a percentage of the required amount. This is not true: we will never refuse to assist or only partially assist our citizens.

The U.S. Department of State Guide to International Financial Scams contains descriptions of common scams, with sample e-mails and letters sent by perpetrators of each.

You can often identify scams by their red flags. Ask yourself some of the questions listed at the bottom of this page. If you answer yes to any of them, you may have encountered a scam. You should be especially suspicious of any contact that you haven't met in person, even if you have built a strong relationship with them over time.

***What resources are available to assist in the identification of scams or money laundering schemes?***

The U.S. Embassy in Abuja ([ConsularAbuja@state.gov](mailto:ConsularAbuja@state.gov)) and the U.S. Consulate in Lagos ([LagosACS@state.gov](mailto:LagosACS@state.gov)) can assist in confirming U.S. citizenship, passports or visas. You can also do your own detective work. Use tools like Google Maps to see if your contact's description of his or her location matches satellite images of the town. Use websites like <http://www.scamdigger.com/> and <http://www.tineye.com/> to search for any photos your contact might have sent to see if they have been previously used in scams or sourced online.

**What do I do if I'm a victim of a scam?**

While it is rarely possible to retrieve money sent to a scammer, reporting the fraud to the appropriate authorities can help prevent future fraud.

Be aware that scammers sometimes use what they call a "recovery approach". Scam victims will often be contacted by people claiming to be U.S. or Nigerian law enforcement officials several weeks or months after they discover they have been scammed. Scam victims are told that the person who scammed them has been caught or that there is an active investigation on them and that they will be caught soon. Victims are told that their money can be recovered, but they are asked to provide funds or fees before the money will be turned back over to them. You should never, under any circumstances, send money in this situation. If you are ever contacted in this manner, do not hesitate to contact the Embassy in Abuja or the Consulate in Lagos to evaluate whether the solicitation is genuine.

- United States Internet Crime Complaint Center: <http://www.ic3.gov/>
- The Nigerian Economic and Financial Crimes Commission: <http://www.efccnigeria.org/>

How can we contact you if we need more information or have additional questions?

**Closing Narration:**

Finally Marcus, thanks a lot again for your time, we really appreciate it, but one final question.

**If American citizens have further questions, how can they contact you?**

More information about everything I spoke about can be found at our website, <http://nigeria.usembassy.gov/service.html>.

Our emails are:

Lagos = [LagosACS@state.gov](mailto:LagosACS@state.gov)

Abuja = [ConsularAbuja@state.gov](mailto:ConsularAbuja@state.gov)

Phone:

Abuja = 09-461-4176 (Goes directly to the ACS Section during office hours)

Lagos = 01-460-3600 (Goes directly to the ACS Section during office hours)

09-460-4000 (for after-hour calls to be connected to the Duty Officer)

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