



American Citizen Services News

Living in Syria: How Sanctions Affect You

Can I work in Syria? Can I pay my electricity bill? What do sanctions mean, and how do they affect me as a U.S. citizen? These are some of the questions we've been fielding through our calls to U.S. citizens in Syria and in the American Citizen Services email inbox.

Since April, when the deteriorating security situation required that we advise our citizens to leave Syria (and when U.S. diplomats assigned to the Embassy in Damascus also sent their family members away for their safety), life in Syria has become even more difficult. Our current travel warning also references the impact of sanctions on U.S. citizens in Syria.

We understand that many of you reading this newsletter cannot depart the country at this time. Perhaps you are closing a family business or taking care of loved ones who are unable to travel. Maybe you are a child with U.S. citizenship with non-U.S. citizen parents. While we still urge all U.S. citizens to

depart Syria, the Consular Section is here to do what it can to assist U.S. citizens whose situations compel them to stay.

What do the sanctions on Syria mean?

Executive order 13582, issued on August 17, 2011, prohibits U.S. citizens from "providing services" to Syria. This affects any U.S. person working within Syria or providing services to a Syrian entity. Since August, the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) of the U.S. Treasury Department has issued several General Licenses to cover transactions it recognized were necessary to enable U.S. citizens to close their businesses and business dealings with Syria, while continue living in Syria if they chose to do so.

Do the sanctions really mean that I can't work in Syria?

The short answer is, yes: E.O. 13582 prohibits you from working in Syria unless your work is covered by a general or specific license. If you feel that your work in Syria should be exempted from sanctions by the U.S. government, you may apply for a specific license from the Department of Treasury.

Why is banking so hard now?

General License 10 allows banks to conduct financial transactions for U.S. persons in Syria, provided that those transactions are not associated with operating a business in Syria. This relates to General License 6 which authorizes noncommercial, personal remittances and General License 9 authorizing U.S. persons to pay living expenses in Syria. However, banks are not obligated to make the exceptions authorized by these licenses, and some may choose not to grant

any exceptions in order to be sure to abide by sanctions. This is why even though withdrawing money from your U.S. bank account with an ATM card may be permitted under General License 9, you are not able to use a U.S.-issued ATM card to do so because of the complexity of knowing when to make an exception.

I am moving back to the United States. Can I get all of my savings out of Syria?

There is no limit on the amount of money that can be taken out of or brought into the U.S. However, when transferring large sums of money from Syria, U.S. citizens will also need to abide by Syrian regulations concerning taking money out of Syria. Make sure you check Syrian regulations concerning who can take money out of the country and how much.

The website for U.S. Customs and Border Protection (<http://cbp.gov>) has specific information about how to bring money into the U.S., and you may cite the General Licenses when conversing with your U.S. bank about how to legally transfer personal remittances into your account. We are always happy to answer questions sent to ACSDamascus@state.gov or posted the [Consular Section's Facebook page](#), but as financial sanctions and customs regulations fall under a different branch of the U.S. government, we will generally refer you to the office that can provide the most authoritative response.

Where do I go with further questions?

The OFAC website provides helpful to [Frequently Asked Questions page](#) about the impact of U.S. sanctions.

Inside this issue:

How Sanctions Affect You	1
Dear Consul: Repatriation	2
Voting: 2012 Primaries	3
Message from USCIS	4
Permissions Needed to Leave	4
Discovering America: Theater	5
ALC Testing Dates	6
Language and Exchange	6
Submitting the I-130	7

Sanctions on Syria: Did you know?

General License 11 issued by the Office of Foreign Assets Control authorizes non-governmental humanitarian organizations working in Syria to continue providing critical social services to the Syrian people without violating U.S. Sanctions.

“Dear Consul...”

Thank you for sending your questions to ACSDamascus@state.gov. This month’s column addresses questions about repatriation assistance and is a fictionalized exchange between a consular officer and an American Citizen.

From: Florida Mom

To: American Citizen Services

I am an American citizen married to a Syrian. We’d always been planning to apply for a green card for my husband, but he’s been working here in Syria and was able to travel just fine on his tourist visa. We have four children, all were born in Syria and all have U.S. passports.

Now times are tough. We had to close our business in Aleppo and I barely have enough money for monthly expenses, forget about plane tickets. I want to heed the advice in your Travel Warning and leave Syria. Can the Embassy help our family financially as we prepare for this move?

From: American Citizen Services

To: Florida Mom

The U.S. Embassy in Damascus can help you depart Syria for the United States first by helping you contact family or friends who might be able to assist your purchase tickets to the U.S. However, if no private resources are available, we are able to provide a “repatriation loan.” These loans are provided to destitute Americans overseas to purchase plane tickets and cover certain incidental expenses related to travel. The U.S. Government tries to ensure that an American citizen can always return to the U.S. Detailed information about the U.S. Repatriation Program can be found online at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/programs/RepManual.pdf>

We understand that you and your children have valid travel documents for entering the U.S., but what about your husband? How will he travel with you?

From: Florida Mom

To: American Citizen Services

I am glad to hear there is some financial assistance for us. You say this is a “loan,” so what are the terms for repayment?

Regarding my husband, he still has a valid tourist visa so he will use it to travel with us and then apply for citizenship in the U.S. He can do that, right?

From: American Citizen Services

To: Florida Mom

Your husband should NOT use a tourist visa to enter the U.S. if his intent is to reside there. Doing so could make him ineligible for future travel, even as an immigrant. He must enter the U.S. with the appropriate visa for your travel purpose.

The good news is that while you are still in Damascus, you may submit an immigrant visa petition for your husband (see page 7 of this newsletter.) Please note that there is no financial assistance from the U.S. Embassy for paying visa fees, and that as part of your husband’s application you will have to show that you can support him in the U.S. or that you have a joint sponsor with enough income to support him and all members of their family above the poverty line. You may find it easier for the U.S. citizens in your family to travel immediately and get settled financially before bringing over relatives as immigrants.

The terms for repaying a repatriation loan are simple: minor children do not incur debt to the U.S. government, and they will travel on their full-validity passports. As their mother, you will incur the debt for all of your tickets, which are bought at the lowest available fare available to the U.S. Embassy for non-official travel but may more expensive than tickets you may be able to find elsewhere. We will cancel your passport and replace it with a limited-validity passport for return to the U.S. Until you have repaid the loan, you will be unable to obtain a full-validity passport for travel outside of the U.S.

From: Florida Mom

To: American Citizen Services

What about when we arrive in the U.S.? I will need money to rent a house and buy food for our family until my husband is able to come, and I am not sure how quickly I can find a job. Can you loan us money for that as well?

From: American Citizen Services

To: Florida Mom

Once you are in the U.S., the U.S. citizens in your family may be eligible for social services such as welfare, food assistance, and employment assistance in the state in which you reside. We recommend researching this online before you travel and even contacting the Human Services department in your state before you arrive. More information about assistance in the U.S. can be found online at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/programs/RepManual.pdf>



Information for Voters



SUBMIT YOUR REGISTRATION AND BALLOT REQUEST FORM FOR UPCOMING JANUARY, FEBRUARY AND MARCH 2012 PRIMARIES AT FVAP.GOV

Submit your registration/ballot request form (FPCA) timed according to your State's election date requirements as listed below for the January, February and March 2012 Presidential Preference Primaries (P), and State Primaries (S).

The Following States allow you to submit a registration/ballot request form (FPCA) now for the 2012 Primary. NOTE: to ensure your request is valid for other 2012 elections, including the November General Presidential election, you must submit ANOTHER FPCA after December 31st!

New Hampshire (P): January 10 South Carolina (P): January 21

The following States allow you to submit a registration/ballot request form (FPCA) now, which will be valid through the 2012 November Presidential election.

Florida (P): January 31	Missouri (Republican P): February 7
Arizona (P): February 28	Georgia (P): March 6
Ohio (S): March 6	Oklahoma (P): March 6
Tennessee (P): March 6	Texas (P,S): March 6
Virginia (P): March 6	Alabama (P,S): March 13
Mississippi (P,S): March 13	Louisiana (P,S): March 24

For the following States, the registration/ballot request form (FPCA) is valid only in the year it is submitted. To ensure your request is valid for all elections in 2012 submit a registration/ballot request form (FPCA) AS SOON AS POSSIBLE after December 31st.

Michigan (P): February 28	Massachusetts (P): March 6
Vermont (P): March 6	Illinois (P,S): March 20

Vote the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB)

The FWAB is a backup ballot. If 30 days before the election (or longer based on your geographic location) you think you will not receive your State ballot in time to vote and return it, (especially in January Primary States) vote the FWAB at FVAP.gov. The FWAB is also available in embassies and consulates and military installations around the world. You may submit the FWAB any time after submitting an FPCA. *FVAP can be contacted at 1-800-438-8683. Citizens may reach FVAP toll-free from 67 countries by using the toll-free numbers listed on the FVAP web portal, <http://www.fvap.gov/contact/index.html>.*

Friends and Family of U.S. Citizens Corner

Message from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS): Tips for Foreign Nationals Impacted by Civil Unrest or Natural Disasters

Conditions in your home country, such as civil unrest or a severe environmental disaster may impede your ability to return home as originally planned or may create temporary financial difficulties for you and your family. Extreme situations beyond your control also may affect your ability to maintain lawful immigration status while in the United States. During these special situations, temporary relief measures may be available to eligible foreign nationals.

If you are a foreign national who has been affected by a severe environmental disaster or other extreme situation, the available options for which you may apply include:

- A change or extension of nonimmigrant status for an individual currently in the United States;
- Expedited adjudication and approval, where possible, of requests for off-campus employment authorization for F-1 students experiencing severe economic hardship;
- Expedited processing of immigrant petitions for immediate relatives of U.S. citizens and relatives of lawful permanent residents whose priority dates are current; and
- Expedited employment authorization where appropriate.

Visitors traveling under the Visa Waiver Program may contact a USCIS local office for assistance. For more information on USCIS humanitarian programs, visit www.uscis.gov or call the National Customer Service Center at 1-800-375-5283.

Leaving Syria? – Make Sure that your Residence Permit (“Iqama”) is Valid and that Children have their Father’s Permission to Travel

In addition to having a valid U.S. passport, U.S. citizens preparing to leave Syria should also ensure that they have the Syrian documentation needed to exit Syria. A U.S. citizen who has a residence permit (“ikama”) authorizing him or her to live in Syria for longer than a normal tourist visit should check to be sure that the residence permit hasn’t expired. If it has expired, the U.S. citizen will need to contact Syrian immigration authorities to have it renewed before being permitted to depart Syria.

Also, a child under the age of eighteen whose father is Syrian or of Syrian descent must have his/her father’s permission to leave Syria, even if the parents are separated or divorced. A family planning to have a child under the age of eighteen travel without the father should be sure to have registered the father’s permission for the child to travel with Syrian immigration authorities.

*****New “*Discovering America*” Feature*****

The Middle East on U.S. Stages

As events in the Middle East reverberate worldwide, the politics and cultures of Arab countries are making their way to U.S. stages. As you make plans to depart Syria and return to the United States, here are some of the theatrical goings-on that await you.

Sons of the Prophet

Reviewed favorably in the New York Times and the New Yorker, *Sons of the Prophet* by Stephen Karam is the story of a Lebanese-American family which finds itself the focus of attention as the descendents of the prophet Khalil Gibran. John Lahr of The New Yorker raves, “‘Ravishing’ is the best word for Stephens Karam’s new comedy *Sons of the Prophet* (elegantly directed by Peter Dubois, at the Roundabout’s Laura Pels). At once deep, deft, and beautifully made, *Sons of the Prophet* stares unflinchingly at the Gorgon’s head of grief – the kind of grief on which words have no purchase, the indigestible pain that never really goes away. In other words, the suffering that an audience expects theatre to deflect with laughter, rather than to embrace.” *Sons of the Prophet* runs at the Roundabout Theater in New York through January 2012.

Arab American Comedy Festival

In 2003, comedians Dean Obeidallah and Maysoon Zayid founded the Arab-American Comedy festival as an outlet for talented Arab youth in the United States to overcome stereotypes in the mainstream media and gently poke fun at both of their cultures, Arab and American. The fall of 2011 marked the eighth annual Arab American Comedy Festival in New York, and there is also an annual festival in Los Angeles as well as U.S. and Middle Eastern tours. An October 6th article by Meredith Blake in The Atlantic praises the festival’s caliber and capacity to bring communities together:

“Originally planned as a one-off event, the festival has expanded considerably since its inception in 2003. It’s become not just a mainstay in the Arab-American community, but also a magnet for casting directors looking



for diverse talent. Close to 50 performers take part in eight shows spanning five nights. They’re mostly Arab, but not exclusively Muslim; there are Christians, atheists, and even an Arab Mormon. The beginning of the festival is dedicated to sketch comedy and storytelling; the second half is stand-up.

“Of course, laughter can be a wonderful way to bridge the divide between cultures... But, in truth, most of the people who attend the Arab-American Comedy Festival aren’t here in attempt to understand “the other”; they are “the other.” For them, the appeal of the festival is that it provides the rare opportunity to see their community portrayed in a humorous light.”

Coming up in 2012: Food and Fadwa

In May-June 2012 New York Theater Workshop will present a new play by Lameece Issaq and Jacob Kader about Fadwa, a Palestinian woman from Bethlehem making preparations for her younger sister’s wedding. “This new play melds the fight a Palestinian family wages to hold onto its traditional culture with its need to celebrate love, joy and hope” -NYTW website.

American Language Center Test Dates

<i>Test</i>	<i>December 2011</i>	<i>January 2012</i>	<i>February 2012</i>
ITP*	Monday, December 12 Wednesday, December 28	Monday, January 16 Tuesday, January 31	Wednesday, February 15 Tuesday, February 28
GRE	N/A	N/A	General Test Saturday, February 11
SAT	Saturday, December 03	Saturday, January 28	N/A
TOEFL	N/A	Saturday, January 14	N/A
TOEIC**	Tuesday, December 27	Monday, January 30	Monday, February 27

ITP: Institutional TOEFL

TOEIC: Test of English for International Communication

For further info pls. call the American Language Center at 011- 3327236/ 011-3337936 (ext. 21 or 22)

LANGUAGE AND EXCHANGE CORNER

The American Language Center, located near the U.S. Embassy, will be starting a new series of English Language courses in January. Placement tickets are on sale now from 9:30-11:30am at the ALC, and the course will run from January 11-March 22, 2012. Open for all levels.

If any of you have family members or friends who are not U.S. citizens, they may be interested in some of the Exchange Programs offered through the State Department. For more information on these opportunities, see the Exchange Programs page of our website (<http://damascus.usembassy.gov/resources/exchange-programs.html>) or connect by email:

FulbrightSyria@State.gov.

**Reminder for U.S. citizens and families: U.S. Embassy in Damascus
accepts Immigrant Visa Petitions on a continuing basis!**

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) announced that effective August 15, 2011, overseas petitioners will be required to file the Form I-130, Petition for Alien Relative, by mail with the USCIS unless the petitioner lives in a country with a USCIS office.

**Due to the hardship this places on
U.S. citizens and their families trying**

to leave Syria quickly during the current period of civil unrest, the embassy has been granted a temporary exception to continue accepting I-130 petitions for parents, spouses, and unmarried children under 21 of U.S. citizens. Please see our website for instructions and more information.

American Citizen Services Hours and Contact Information

U.S. Embassy Damascus
American Citizen Services
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PO Box 29
Damascus, Syria

Phone: (+963-11) 3391-4444
Fax: (+963-11) 3391-3999)



UPCOMING HOLIDAY CLOSURES

*The Embassy will be closed on
Sunday, December 25, 2011 — Christmas Day
Sunday, January 1, 2012 — New Year's Day
Sunday, January 15, 2012 — Birthday of Martin
Luther King, Jr.*

When an individual is protesting society's refusal to acknowledge his dignity as a human being, his very act of protest confers dignity on him.

-Bayard Rustin, American civil rights activist