



American Citizen Services News

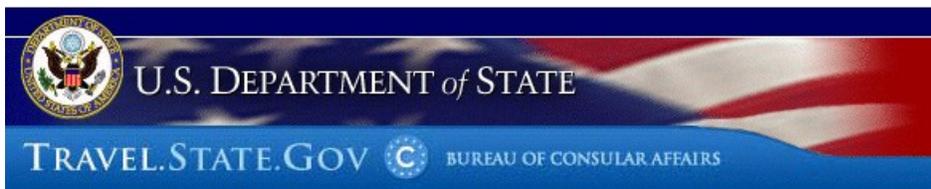
What Does a Travel Warning Mean for Me?

Last month, we discussed the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) and how it enables us to communicate with you more effectively as well as assist you in an emergency. Some of you are receiving this newsletter by email for the first time because you have enrolled through the [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program](#).

Those who were enrolled with us also received the various warden messages issued by this Embassy, or the Travel Alert and Travel Warnings issued by the State Department concerning the security situation in Syria.

First and foremost, we encourage you to read the [text](#) of the travel warning at <http://travel.state.gov>.

Like our [Country-Specific Information for Syria](#), the Travel Warning advises people that they might be detained if they take pictures of sensitive locations and it also reiterates that the Syrian government does not notify us in a timely manner about arrested Americans nor does it provide prompt access as required by the Vienna Convention on Con-



sular Relations. However, it goes much further by warning U.S. citizens of “the potential for ongoing political and civil unrest in Syria” and urging U.S. citizens to defer non-essential travel to Syria.

We also advised U.S. citizens in Syria to closely examine their security situation and consider departing Syria.

Some have contacted us to ask what the “authorized departure” mentioned in the April 4 Travel Warning meant.

Here are a few questions and answers about what the Travel Warning means for you and your loved ones:

Q: The news said you are providing “free flights.” How do I get one?

The U.S. Government is not providing free flights. Commercial travel to and from Syria is still available, and members of the public may choose the best travel option for themselves at a cost that best suits their budget.

What may have been misinterpreted is the phrase “Authorized Departure.” In this case, “Authorized Departure” means that family members of the diplomatic personnel assigned to the Embassy are authorized to return to the U.S. if they wish at U.S. government expense.

In the same way that the U.S. government pays for its diplomats and their families to come to Syria and work at the Embassy, under “authorized departure” the U.S. government pays for family members to return to the U.S. if they wish. What this does is enable U.S. Embassy families to act on the same advice that was given to private citizens in our first travel warning, to “consider departing.”

Q: Does the travel warning mean I have to leave Syria immediately?

A: The travel warning advised U.S. citizens to consider departing. Every person’s circumstances are different, and we leave it up to private individuals to determine what is best for them.

Q: It seems very calm where I live. Why are you saying the situation is so bad?

A: The travel warning concerns all of Syria. Some areas are calm others are not, and the situation can change rapidly. The primary message of the Travel Warning is: Be aware of what is happening and ensure that your travel documents are current. (con’t next page)

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Travel Warning (continued from page 1)

Q: My child was born in the U.S., but my husband and I are Syrian. If we decide that it is safer for our child in the U.S., can we go with them?

A: U.S. citizens may enter the U.S. with their passports. Syrian citizens need visas to enter the U.S.

If a family wants to move permanently to the U.S., U.S. citizen children who are over 21 may file a petition for their parents to receive immigrant visas. U.S. citizens may contact our Immigrant Visa Unit at ivdamascus@state.gov to inquire about filing a petition at the Embassy.

If a family only intends to travel to the U.S. for a short time they can make an appointment on our website (damascus.usembassy.gov) to apply for nonimmigrant visas. They will have an interview with a consular officer who will determine their eligibility.

Q: Why are you sending so many messages in a short period of time?

A: This is a rapidly changing situation and our primary responsibility is the safety and welfare of American citizens. In fact, according to the “No Double-Standard Policy” written into U.S. law, the U.S. government must inform private citizens in country of any security-related information that we disseminate to embassy staff. Therefore, when we have general or specific information that needs to be shared, we share it with everyone at the same time.

Q: I am getting calls from someone who says they are a “warden,” telling me about the travel warnings and passing on other messages. What does that mean?

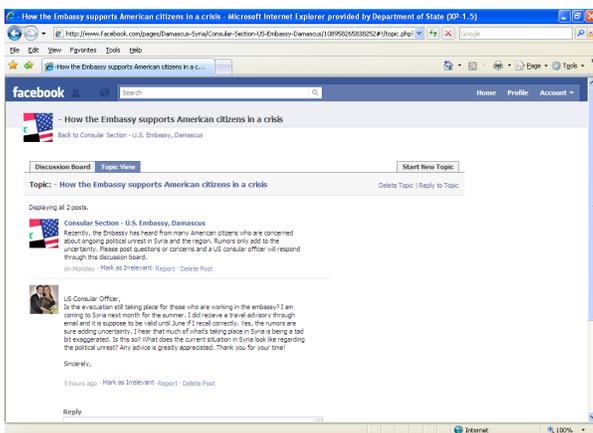
A: Most U.S. embassies have an established network of wardens. Wardens are private citizens who volunteer their time to help us safeguard the welfare of American citizens, primarily by ensuring that Americans in their area have received the “Warden Messages” sent out by the Consular Section of the U.S. Embassy. When you enroll through the STEP program, you are providing information about your location that helps us place you in the appropriate “Warden Zone.” If we issue a warden message that is mandatory to transmit by phone, the warden responsible for your zone will contact you using the information you provided during your registration. In emergencies wardens might help locate missing U.S. citizens. If you are interested in being a warden, please contact us at ACSDamascus@state.gov.

Q: What happens if the situation improves? How will I know if the travel warning is lifted?

A: The Embassy, in consultation with the Department of State, regularly reviews the situation. If the situation improves, the U.S. Government would determine whether a Travel Warning is still merited. If a Travel Warning is no longer necessary, we would issue a Warden Message advising the public that the Travel Warning has been withdrawn.

Additional information about what the State Department can do to assist U.S. citizens during a crisis is available online at http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/emergencies/emergencies_1212.html

Talk to us on Facebook



The Consular Section of the US Embassy in Damascus will be kicking off a real-time Facebook discussion board on Sunday, April 17. To participate, just log into Facebook and “like” our page, *Consular Section U.S. Embassy Damascus*, at <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Damascus-Syria/Consular-Section-US-Embassy-Damascus/108958265838252>. Click on the “Discussion” link in the left-hand menu and you will find consular officers answering questions on topics such as:

- How the Embassy supports American citizens in a crisis
- How to immigrate to the United States
- How to apply for a visa
- Any other questions you might have.

Taxation and Representation

FILE YOUR TAXES FOR FREE BY APRIL 15!

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) advises that U.S. citizens and resident aliens living outside the United States can use IRS Free File to prepare and file their federal tax returns electronically.

IRS Free File is brand-name software that is offered exclusively at IRS.gov, through a partnership with the tax software industry.

There are five companies that accept foreign addresses. Taxpayers should review the list of tax forms supported by the company to ensure it meets their needs, especially Form 1116, Foreign Tax Credit, and/or Form 2555, Foreign Earned Income.

To be eligible, taxpayers' adjusted gross income in 2010 must be \$58,000 or less. Some overseas taxpayers may exclude \$91,500 of their 2010 foreign earnings, which would make more people eligible for IRS Free File.

Free File software generally asks questions and taxpayers supply the answers. The software completes the proper tax forms, does the math, and allows for free electronic filing through IRS e-file. By filing electronically, taxpayers due refunds and who have U.S. bank accounts can opt for direct deposit and get their refunds in as few as 10 days.

To get started with IRS Free File, go to www.irs.gov/freefile and select "Pick a Free File Company."

Taxpayers with an Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) over \$58,000 can efile their returns by purchasing online software. Check the software provider's information to ensure that it can accommodate a foreign address.

ELECTION INFO FOR WV RESIDENTS

On Saturday, May 14, 2011, West Virginia will hold a special primary election for Governor to fulfill the unexpired term, through January 13, 2013. The vacancy was created when former Governor Joe Manchin won election to the United States Senate. This is a statewide primary election, however only the Democratic and Republican parties have chosen a primary as their method of candidate selection. The Mountain Party has chosen to hold a convention to select a candidate.

Register to Vote

To vote in this election you must **register** by submitting a post-marked Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) or a West Virginia Voter Registration Application. West Virginia allows you to email or fax the FPCA, but if this is your first time registering to vote in a particular West Virginia county, you must mail the original FPCA. Mailed Voter Registration applications must be postmarked and sent to the local county clerk by **April 25, 2011**. Voter Registration Applications transmitted by other methods must be received by the county clerk no later than close of business **April 25, 2011**.

Request Your Ballot Now!

You may also use the FPCA to request an absentee ballot. **Go to FVAP.gov and get started! It only takes a few minutes!** Alternately you may obtain an FPCA from your unit or installation voting assistance officer and at U.S. embassies and consulates worldwide; but you must follow the West Virginia instructions given at FVAP.gov. Indicate on the FPCA how you would like to receive your absentee ballot, by mail, email, or fax. You **will not** receive a ballot automatically, even if you voted in the November 2, 2010 general election.

If you choose to **email** your FPCA, you should send the form to the email address listed for your county clerk at <http://www.wvsos.com/>. If you are already registered to vote, the deadline for submitting an FPCA to request a ballot is **May 9, 2011**. You can also use the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot at www.fvap.gov.

American Language Center Test Dates

Test	April 2011	May 2011	June 2011
ITP	Wednesday, April 6 Monday, April 18	Wednesday, May 4 Monday, May 23	Wednesday, June 8 Thursday, June 30
GRE	Subject Test Saturday, April 9	N/A	N/A
SAT	N/A	Saturday, May 7	Saturday, June 4
TOEFL	N/A	Saturday, May 7	N/A
TSE	No longer offered	No longer offered	No longer offered
TOEIC	Wednesday, April 27	Tuesday, May 24	Wednesday, June 29



American Citizen Services

For appointments, please go
to our website at :

<http://damascus.usembassy.gov/service.html>

**U.S. Embassy Damascus
American Citizen Services
Consular Section
2, Al-Mansour Street, Abu Roumaneh
PO Box 29
Damascus, Syria
Phone: (+963-11) 3391-4444
Fax: (+963-11) 3391-3999)**

UPCOMING HOLIDAY CLOSURES

April 15 Evacuation Day
April 24 Easter Sunday

“Assisting approximately 4 million Americans who reside overseas and nearly 60 million who travel abroad remains a top priority for the U.S. Government.

Though consular work is punctuated by extraordinary acts to help U.S. citizens during times of crisis or urgent need, it is built upon a foundation of services provided to an American public that increasingly lives, works, and learns in the global community.”