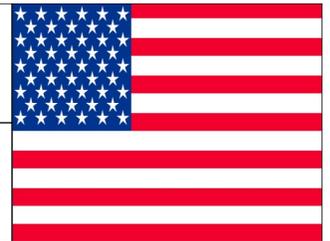




U.S. Embassy, Lusaka

CONSULAR COMMUNICATOR



Our SMS Notification System by Rob Romanowski

January—March 2014

Google allows its employees to spend twenty percent of their office time on side projects of personal interest. This policy has led to some innovative (and profitable) successes, such as Gmail.

Sometimes even non-sanctioned side projects have proven wildly transformative. For example in 1971, while writing programming for the ARPANET, the internet precursor, Roy Tomlinson famously told his colleague, "Don't tell anyone! This isn't what we're supposed to be working on." He had just invented email. Just a few years later, 75 percent of the ARPANET's traffic was email and of course the popularity of email did not end there.

Allowing employees the creative freedom to assess and improve workplace sys-

tems frequently benefits the employer as well. While the U.S. government is not as fleet-footed as Silicon Valley companies, many employees are nonetheless exploring ways to customize services to the needs of local audiences. This is especially important at the U.S. Department of State where audiences differ from country to country. One example is the ways in which employees are working to improve the dissemination of information to U.S. citizens abroad.

The U.S. government provides routine and urgent messages to overseas U.S. citizens who are registered with an embassy through an official email-based system. In countries with weak internet infrastructure, however, this system is disadvantaged since email can often be difficult to routinely access.

As a result, the U.S. Embassy in Lusaka has supplemented its consular notification system with an SMS-based system for cell phones. The SMS-based system is never used exclusively (an email message is always sent), and it is not used in all situations. In cases in which information is time-sensitive (such as a protest or civil disturbance), a SMS text message may be sent out in addition to an email message. Finally, only U.S. citizens who choose to register with the embassy consular section can be notified.

There are a few caveats, though, that require clarification. While the embassy has selected a telecom-provider that has agreed to not use or disseminate any private information (the person's name and phone number), we can never guarantee that such information will not be disclosed. Also, while the U.S. Embassy pays to send out SMS messages, we cannot also guarantee

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that further costs will not be incurred by the SMS recipient.

If you are a registered citizen and prefer to only receive the email messages, please let us know by sending us an email to ACSLusaka@state.gov and we will remove your record from our SMS database. Conversely, if you are registered and have not received any SMS messages from us and would like to be added, please send us an email to the same address.

We aim to strengthen our effective communication with American travelers and residents in Zambia but we are also cognizant and sensitive to your privacy concerns. We value your feedback in seeking this balance.



American Citizen Services (ACS) Assistant, Beatrice Mfula and Rob Romanowski, Consul

CONSULAR COMMUNICATOR

U.S. Embassy News:

New U.S. Ambassador to Zambia:

U.S. Embassy officers are frequently asked when the new U.S. Ambassador to Zambia is expected to arrive. President Barack Obama's nominee, Ambassador-Designate Eric T. Schultz, has appeared before the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations (his official statements can be found here: <http://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Schultz.pdf>), and his nomination is currently awaiting Congressional confirmation.

Small Grants Programs:

The United States is dedicated to working with the government and people of Zambia to reduce the spread of HIV and achieve an AIDS-free generation. The United States Embassy announces a call for applications for the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) Small Grants Program. Registered grassroots organizations working in the areas of HIV and AIDS prevention and the care and support of orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) are eligible to apply. The U.S. Embassy is now accepting applications through March 7, 2014 for grant awards up to ZMK 100,000. More information can be found at: <http://zambia.usembassy.gov/smallgrants.html>

In addition to the PEPFAR small grants program, the U.S. Embassy provides small scale funding through Zambia-based community organizations through the U.S. Ambassador's

Special Self-Help and U.S. African Development Foundation programs (SSH/ADF). More information and application qualifications can be found at:

http://zambia.usembassy.gov/zambia/ambassadors_self_help_fund2.html

U.S. Visa Fraud Warning:

If you are a U.S. citizen resident in Zambia and have Zambian employees or friends who are interested in visiting the United States, please direct them to our embassy website for all visa information:

<http://zambia.usembassy.gov/nivinfo.html>

Scammers often promise that they can provide U.S. visas to applicants via mail if applicants send a payment to them through Western Union or similar wire services. All such notices and emails are fraudulent. All non-immigrant visa payments are only made at the U.S. Embassy; there are no exceptions.



PEPFAR
U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief

CONSULAR COMMUNICATOR

American Citizen Services Corner

The Affordable Care Act (ACA)

If you are a U.S. citizen living abroad, here is what you need to know:

From 2014, the individual shared responsibility provision of ACA requires U.S. citizens to have minimum essential coverage (MEC), qualify for an exemption, or make a payment when filing their federal income tax return. However, U.S. citizens or residents living abroad for at least 330 days within a 12 month period and/or who qualify as a bona fide resident of a foreign country for an entire taxable year are treated as having MEC, and therefore will not owe a shared responsibility payment for any of those 12 months.

For the most up-to-date information visit the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) webpage [Am I Eligible for Coverage in the Health Insurance Market Place?](#)

2014 Election Cycle

It is an election year! The 2014 mid-term elections will be held on Tuesday, November 4, 2014. This year all 435 seats in the United States House of Representatives and 33 of the 100 seats in the United States Senate will be contested. along with 38 state governorships, as well as many state-level positions.

We are here to assist U.S. citizen voters overseas. Our goal is to inform you about your voting rights, to ensure you are able to exercise your right, and to assist you with voting in state or local elections, if allowed by your state.

Be an active voter. Start thinking about your participation in the 2014 election cycle today.

For voting queries, please visit the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) [website](#) or contact us at ACSLusaka@state.gov Completed absentee ballots can be dropped at the consular section during business hours.

The Embassy Voting Officer is Vice Consul Brian Grandjean who may be reached at ACSLusaka@state.gov

U.S. Embassy Contact Information:

Emergency Mobile: 0966 877 805

Routine Contact Info:

ACSLusaka@state.gov



CONSULAR COMMUNICATOR

American Citizen Services Corner

Protect Yourself from Scammers:

Financial scams originating from overseas are a real and growing problem. Individual U.S. citizens have lost considerable sums of money on these scams, ranging from a few hundred dollars to hundreds of thousands of dollars. While confidence schemes have long existed, the advent of the Internet has greatly increased their prevalence, and the Department of State receives daily inquiries from victims. Scams may involve Internet dating, inheritance, work permits, overpayment, and money-laundering.

For information about these scams and what you can do to protect yourself (or what to do if you are the victim of a scam), visit the Department of State [webpage on Financial Scams](#).

Identity Theft and Expired Passports:

Do not throw out those old passports. Smart travelers stash a recently expired passport away in a different place than their valid one when on the road. If the valid passport is lost during the trip, the expired passport is still evidence of identity and citizenship and assists in obtaining a new emergency document.

Also, an expired passport can prove pre-

vious travel or periods of residence in the United States. If you do decide to dispose of travel documents, please do not throw them out with the trash. These documents contain valuable personally identifiable information that should be closely guarded. Identity thieves or other criminals look for this type of information in order to perpetrate cyber-crimes and identity theft. Protect yourself and your information by shredding any documents that contain personal information.



Federal Tax Season Approaches:

U.S. citizens and Permanent Residents who live abroad may have questions about filing taxes. Working and living overseas does not exempt you from filing a U.S. tax return, although much of your income may be exempt.

Want to find out more about filing taxes while living abroad? Visit the [IRS site for overseas Americans](#).