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Visa and Passport Delays Expected to Continue Through Next Week

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On June 12, 2015, the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs first announced that a hardware failure on June 9 had led to technical problems with overseas passport and visa systems. The hardware failure had halted the flow of security clearance requests from the overseas posts to the State Department's Consular Consolidated Database ("CCD"). Since that time, the overseas posts have been unable to obtain security clearance for these applicants, and, in the interest of national security, the Bureau could not bypass the legal requirements necessary to screen visa applicants before issuing visas and passports. Thus, the Bureau has been forced to suspend the issuance of U.S. passports and visas at its overseas diplomatic missions. More than 100 computer experts from the public and private sectors are working round the clock to fix the problem. Nevertheless, the Bureau does not expect the system will be online before next week. The local embassies/consulates

are already in the process of rescheduling upcoming appointments for after July 6, but there is no guarantee that the problem will be fixed by that date.

The Bureau stated that the issue was not specific to any particular country, citizenship document or visa category. Passport applications accepted overseas from May 26, 2015 to June 14 are affected, but emergency passports are available to U.S. citizens overseas for urgent travel.

Similarly, the Bureau is unable to print most immigrant and nonimmigrant visas approved after June 8, 2015, or to process new applications submitted on or after June 9, 2015. Applicants who have visa interview appointments scheduled for June 14-20, and who submitted the DS-160 online application

after June 9, should reschedule their appointments. Applicants who submitted the DS-160 *before* June 9 and who have scheduled visa appointments should plan to attend their visa interview appointments. Local embassies and consulates are also posting location-specific information on their websites.

Due to the inability to issue visas, there is a growing backlog of visas waiting to be processed. The Bureau is working as quickly as possible to resolve the issue and to clear this backlog. In the meantime, the Bureau can assist nonimmigrant visa applicants with urgent humanitarian travel. Travelers with an urgent humanitarian need for travel should contact their nearest U.S. embassy or consulate. The Bureau is also prioritizing pending overseas adoption cases, including those in China, with the intention to issue these visas with few delays. The Bureau is also prioritizing temporary H-2A agricultural workers, as the lack of workers is costing the U.S. agricultural industry an estimated \$500,000 to \$1 million for each day of delay.

The State Department faced a similar computer crash involving the CCD last summer, once again during peak travel season. The CCD was supposed to receive an upgrade at the end of 2014, which would have contained two redundant systems to avoid such crashes in the future. While the Bureau claims that this issue is distinct from last year's issue, it is unclear why the redundancies that were supposed to have been built in to the system have apparently never taken effect.

We will continue to monitor this situation and keep our clients up to date with the very latest information.

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