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DHS Announces Further Travel Restrictions for the Visa Waiver Program

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DHS Press Office

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WASHINGTON—The Department of Homeland Security today announced that it is continuing its implementation of the Visa Waiver Program Improvement and Terrorist Travel Prevention Act of 2015 with the addition of Libya, Somalia, and Yemen as three countries of concern, limiting Visa Waiver Program travel for certain individuals who have traveled to these countries.

Pursuant to the Act, the Secretary of Homeland Security had sixty days to determine whether additional countries or areas of concern should be subject to the travel or dual nationality restrictions under the Act. After careful consideration, and in consultation with the Director of National Intelligence and the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Homeland Security has determined that Libya, Somalia, and Yemen be included as countries of concern, specifically for individuals who have traveled to these countries since March 1, 2011. At this time, the restriction on Visa Waiver Program travel will not apply to dual nationals of these three countries. DHS continues to consult with the Department of State and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence to develop further criteria to determine whether other countries would be added to this list.

[Last month](#), the United States began implementing changes under the Act. The three additional countries designated today join Iran, Iraq, Sudan and Syria as countries subject to restrictions for Visa Waiver Program travel for certain individuals. Under the new law, the Secretary of Homeland Security may waive these restrictions if he determines that such a waiver is in the law enforcement or national security interests of the United States. Such waivers will be granted only on a case-by-case basis. As a general matter, categories of travelers who may be eligible for a waiver include individuals who traveled to these countries on behalf of international organizations, regional organizations, and sub-national governments on official duty; on behalf of a humanitarian NGO on official duty; or as a journalist for reporting purposes.

The addition of these three countries is indicative of the Department's continued focus on the threat of foreign fighters. DHS continues to review the security of the Visa Waiver Program, the threat environment, and potential vulnerabilities. This is the latest step in a series of actions over the past 15 months to strengthen the security of the Visa Waiver Program and ensure the Program's requirements are commensurate with the growing threat from foreign terrorist fighters, many of whom are nationals of Visa Waiver Program countries.

An updated Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) application with additional questions on travel to Libya, Somalia, and Yemen will be released this spring 2016 to address exceptions for diplomatic- and military-related travel provided for in the Act.

Individuals impacted will still be able to apply for a visa using the regular immigration process at our embassies or consulates. For those who need a U.S. visa for urgent business, medical, or humanitarian travel to the United States, U.S. embassies and consulates stand ready to provide visa interview appointments on an expedited basis. The new law does not ban travel to the United States, or admission into the United States, and the great majority of Visa Waiver Program travelers will not be affected.

Information on visa applications can be found at travel.state.gov.

Current ESTA holders are encouraged to check their ESTA status prior to travel on U.S. Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) website at esta.cbp.dhs.gov.

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