



DHS Announces Implementation of Visa Sanctions on Four Countries

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Cambodia, Eritrea, Guinea, and Sierra Leone Have Failed to Accept Removed Nationals

WASHINGTON — The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) today announced, in coordination with the State Department, the implementation of visa sanctions on Cambodia, Eritrea, Guinea, and Sierra Leone due to lack of cooperation in accepting their nationals ordered removed from the United States.

Pursuant to her authority under Section 243(d) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), Acting Secretary of Homeland Security Elaine Duke notified Secretary of State Rex Tillerson that the governments of Cambodia, Eritrea, Guinea, and Sierra Leone have denied or unreasonably delayed accepting their nationals ordered removed from the United States. As a result, Secretary of State Tillerson has ordered consular officers in these countries to implement visa restrictions on certain categories of visa applicants, determined on a country-by-country basis. Without an appropriate response from the impacted countries, the scope of these sanctions may be expanded to a wider population. The suspension will remain in place on each of these respective countries until the Secretary of Homeland Security notifies Secretary Tillerson that cooperation on removals has improved to an acceptable level.

“International law obligates each country to accept the return of its nationals ordered removed from the United States,” said Acting Secretary of Homeland Security Elaine Duke. “Cambodia, Eritrea, Guinea, and Sierra Leone have failed in that responsibility. The United States itself routinely cooperates with foreign governments in documenting and accepting its citizens when asked, as do the majority of countries in the world. However, these countries have failed to do so, and that one way street ends with these sanctions.”

As a result of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Zadvydas v. Davis*, with narrow exceptions, aliens with final orders of removal, including aliens determined to pose a threat to the community or considered a flight risk, may not be detained beyond a presumptively reasonable period of six months if there is no "significant likelihood of removal in the reasonably foreseeable future." By delaying or refusing to issue travel documents to their citizens, the most common of which is a passport, or refusing accept their nationals within this time period, these countries have forced U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to release thousands of dangerous criminals into communities across the United States. Without a travel document issued by an alien's home country to confirm identity and nationality, ICE cannot complete the removal process, with very limited exceptions.

"American citizens have been harmed because foreign governments refuse to take back their citizens. These sanctions will ensure that the problem these countries pose will get no worse as ICE continues its work to remove dangerous criminals from the United States," said ICE Acting Director Thomas Homan.

These four countries have not established reliable processes for issuing travel documents to their nationals ordered removed from the United States. For this reason, ICE has been forced to release into the United States approximately 2,137 Guinean and 831 Sierra Leone nationals, many with serious criminal convictions.

There are approximately 700 Eritrean nationals residing in the United States who are subject to final orders of removal. Due to lack of travel document issuance, ICE continues to be compelled to release Eritrean nationals into U.S. communities, some with serious criminal convictions, including violent offenses and drug convictions.

There are more than 1,900 Cambodian nationals residing in the United States who are subject to a final order of removal, of whom 1,412 have criminal convictions. Due to lack of travel document issuance, ICE continues to be compelled to release Cambodian nationals into U.S. communities, some with serious criminal convictions, including weapons and sex offenses, and drug convictions.

Specific sanctions effective September 13, 2017 are listed below:

The U.S. Embassy in Phnom Penh, Cambodia has discontinued the issuance of B visas (temporary visitors for business or pleasure) for Cambodian Ministry of Foreign Affairs employees, with the rank of Director General and above, and their families.

The U.S. Embassy in Asmara, Eritrea has discontinued the issuance of all B visas (temporary visitors for business or pleasure).

The United States Embassy in Conakry, Guinea has discontinued the issuance of B visas (temporary visitors for business or pleasure), and F, J, and M visas (temporary visitors for student and exchange programs) to Guinean government officials and their immediate family members.

The United States Embassy in Freetown, Sierra Leone has discontinued the issuance of B visas (temporary visitors for business or pleasure) to Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials and immigration officials.

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