

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

WASHINGTON

The Secretary of State presents his compliments to Their Excellencies and Messieurs and Mesdames the Chiefs of Mission and has the honor to address the limited circumstances in which foreign protective escorts accompanying visiting foreign government dignitaries are allowed to bring firearms and/or ammunition into the United States. The Department requests the Chiefs of Mission to bring this vital information to the attention of all Sending State personnel to Washington, DC, consulates throughout the United States and their respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs. The Department notes that its prior circular note no. 04-03 (available at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/124985.pdf>) addresses the limited circumstances in which foreign mission personnel in the United States may bring firearms and/or ammunition into the United States.

The United States Bureau of Customs and Border Protection (CBP) is responsible for clearing individuals coming into the United States with firearms or ammunition. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is responsible for implementing security-screening procedures that protect the traveling public by preventing any deadly or dangerous objects from being transported onto an

aircraft. TSA and CBP have the authority to seize and/or hold any firearm or ammunition being brought into the United States and will do so if the proper notifications have not been completed.

Federal law generally prohibits the importation or transportation into the United States of firearms and ammunition by foreigners. The prohibition on importing firearms and ammunition has an exception for officials of foreign governments if the firearm or ammunition is shipped, transported, possessed, or received in the official capacity. A port courtesy request to the Department of State serves as the mechanism for informing federal entities that a foreign government dignitary will be arriving with armed Foreign Protective Escorts (FPEs). If the request is approved, FPEs may only bring weapons into the United States for the purpose of protecting the visiting foreign government dignitary they are accompanying. Chiefs of Mission are reminded that port courtesies will not be granted to allow advance teams to bring weapons into the United States. FPEs traveling with the dignitary may be permitted to bring weapons for the advance FPEs already in the United States. In such cases, it is imperative that the FPEs traveling with the dignitary be listed in the port courtesy request as many times as necessary to address all of the weapons with which they are travelling, including those they are bringing for the advance FPEs.

Chiefs of Mission are reminded that port courtesy requests must include all required information concerning the dignitary, FPEs and weapon(s). In addition, Chiefs of Mission are reminded that they are directly responsible for ensuring that any armed FPEs sent to the United States by their governments:

- Are trained and proficient in the use of weapons that such individuals have been assigned to carry during their time in the United States;
- Are able to communicate in English;
- Will carry weapons **ONLY** when accompanying the dignitary to whom they are assigned; and
- Will securely store their weapons when they are not on duty.

Finally, port courtesy requests which include armed FPEs must be submitted a minimum of three business days in advance of the arrival date. The port courtesy request, if approved, allows for the temporary importation of weapons for official purposes only by the FPEs listed in the request.

It is important to understand that the port courtesy does not constitute a weapons permit authorizing the possession or carrying of weapons in specific jurisdictions within the United States, which is a matter regulated by state and local authorities, not the Department of State.

Armed FPEs included on port courtesy requests must also meet the requirements for and be traveling on the appropriate A, C, G, or NATO visa when coming to the United States. FPEs may not seek to enter the United States with weapons and/or ammunition under the Visa Waiver Program (Electronic System

for Travel Authorization – ESTA) or a nonimmigrant visa classification other than the appropriate A, C, G, or NATO visa.

All foreign nationals, regardless of their status, are prohibited from importing firearms restricted by the National Firearms Act, such as machine guns, silencers, and short-barreled rifles, shotguns and Tasers. Foreign nationals are also prohibited from importing semi-automatic assault weapons or large-capacity ammunition-feeding devices.

The Department of State would like to remind all missions that FPEs must comply with all airline regulations when transporting weapons. Generally, travelers may only transport unloaded firearms in a locked, hard-sided container as checked baggage. The container must be completely secured from being accessed. Firearms and ammunition must be packed separately. It is advised that FPEs check the regulations of the corresponding commercial airline he or she plans to travel with and review the company's policy when traveling with weapons. The Department of State will not intervene in an airline's decision concerning the location of the weapon(s) and/or ammunition within the aircraft and how they are transported.

For questions or concerns regarding this matter, please contact the Bureau of Diplomatic Security/Protective Liaison Division or the Office of the Chief of Protocol/Port Courtesies Desk.

U.S. Department of State,

Washington, June 10, 2015

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several loops and a vertical stroke, positioned to the right of the typed text.