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Statement by Secretary Jeh C. Johnson on Intention to Implement Security Enhancements to the Visa Waiver Program

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As I have said a number of times now, the current global threat environment requires that we know more about those who travel to the United States. This includes those from countries for which we do not require a visa. Additionally, United Nations Security Council Resolution 2178, adopted last September with our strong support, urges member nations to do more to address the growing threat of foreign terrorist fighters.

Today the U.S. government is taking a significant step toward these objectives.

Our Visa Waiver Program is a valuable program for lawful trade and travel with this Nation's most trusted partners. Currently, there are 38 participants in the Program. There is more we can do to enhance the security of this valuable program.

Today I announce that the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of State, along with certain other federal agencies, will begin introducing a number of additional or revised security criteria for all participants in the Visa Waiver Program. These criteria will apply to both new and current members of the Program, and current Program members are being consulted about these changes.

Most significant among the new security requirements:

- Required use of e-passports for all Visa Waiver Program travelers coming to the United States,
- Required use of the INTERPOL Lost and Stolen Passport Database to screen travelers crossing a Visa Waiver country's borders,
- Permission for the expanded use of U.S. federal air marshals on international flights from Visa Waiver countries to the United States.

These security enhancements build on changes we made last fall, when we added additional data fields of information in the application (known as the Electronic System for Travel Authorization, or "ESTA") of those seeking to travel to the United States with Visa Waiver passports.

The security enhancements we announce today are part of this Department's continuing assessments of our homeland security in the face of evolving threats and challenges, and our determination to stay one step ahead of those threats and challenges. And, it is our considered judgment that the security enhancements we announce today will not hinder lawful trade and travel with our partners in the Visa Waiver Program. These measures will enhance security for all concerned.

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