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Other issues:

c: Context and Guidelines for Issuing Travel Advice



Annex VIII: Context and Guidelines for Issuing Travel Advice

Adopted by resolution A/RES/508(XVI) at the sixteenth session of the General Assembly of the World Tourism Organization, the current guidelines on travel advisories date from 2005.

The High Level Task Force (HLTF) on Tourism and Security, created by the 104th Executive Council identified that Travel Advice was one of the specific topics that needed to be re-examined. Members of the HLTF together with the UNWTO secretariat have worked on the new guidelines and have then consulted with the entire HLTF.

CONTEXT FOR ISSUING TRAVEL ADVICE

1. Issuing Travel Advice about visiting another country is a national competence. Each Government will normally seek various sources of information and intelligence before issuing a Travel Advice but the ultimate decision and responsibility rests with that Government.
2. Travel Advice has become an important source of information in assessing the risk associated with travelling to a country.
3. As tourism has grown in economic and social importance, the impact of Travel Advice on countries can be highly significant in terms of loss of jobs, foreign exchange, income and investment, thus setting back their economic development for many years.
4. The onus of responsibility to get the balance of Travel Advice right (between adequately protecting citizens from perceived risks and the risks that they actually encounter) has increased greatly in recent years.

Precautionary incentives act as pressures on issuers of Travel Advice to err on the side of caution to protect citizens. Failure to caution prospective visitors to a country appropriately can lead to avoidable deaths and injuries and, despite disclaimers, to the risk of legal action being taken against the issuers.

Having raised the level of risk it becomes very difficult to then reduce it for fear that another incident might occur because of potential consequences.

If incidents might occur, consular services are concerned to minimize the number of people affected so discouraging visitation through Travel Advice can become an objective.

Incidents that were recorded in Travel Advice many years ago remain for fear that a similar incident might occur even when they have no relevance to current risks.

The impact of these precautionary incentives on the receiving country is considerable as:

- a) The contribution of tourism to the prosperity and stability of a country is undermined.
- b) Often there are varying assessments of the situation made by the media and by the country itself that are different from that conveyed by the Travel Advice.

- c) The countries issuing the Travel Advice resist amending the Advice because of the internal pressures.
 - d) Trust is undermined between countries as the issuers of the Travel Advice 'against' a country are seen to be acting politically.
5. Citizens should be able to compare the threat level they might encounter in different countries that they consider visiting with that of their own country in simple factual consistent ways.
6. The risks encountered by tourists of different nationalities can differ but in most cases will be the same. Conflicting Travel Advice from different countries on the same destination country can confuse citizens and undermine trust between countries:
- a) Some people hold multiple nationalities, if the contents of the Travel Advice are conflicting which Advice should be followed?
 - b) Why is it deemed safe for one nationality to travel to a country or to a destination within a country but not another?
7. Potential or actual incidents/risks are often confined to particular geographical areas of a country that can be geo-referenced. But Travel Advice does not always reflect this reality so a whole country can suffer unreasonably from 'Blanket Travel Advice'.

GUIDELINES FOR ISSUING TRAVEL ADVICE

1. The objectives of the Travel Advice are:
- a) To provide citizens with reliable information and impartial advice on safety and security upon which their choices of destinations to visit can be assessed and compared;
 - b) Not to undermine good relations between countries issuing Travel Advice and those countries receiving it;
 - c) To ensure that the long term global strategic interests (e.g., stability, prosperity and openness) prevail over short term precautionary measures; and
 - d) To safeguard Ministers and Officials from being exposed to charges of acting politically or imprudently when giving impartial advice to potential travellers.
2. In order to aid citizens and to improve the consistency of Travel Advice within and between countries Travel Advice should be written using a simple standard structure.
3. Cooperation and dialogue
- a) So as to avoid conflicting Travel Advice, the countries issuing Travel Advice should set up permanent systems of dialogue, cooperation and review to reach a common view (if that is possible) on the level of risks that will be encountered when visiting a country. This regular dialogue should be used to help guarantee that unnecessary Travel Advice is removed.
 - b) Continuous efforts should be made to improve information and cooperation mechanisms by regularly reviewing and enhancing processes and crucial interfaces between relevant actors, including consultation with the affected country.

4. Communication
 - a) The language used should be simple, accessible and comprehensible to all readers. The tone should be neutral and factual, omitting any subjective language. The language used should not, whenever possible, either promote or discourage travel.
 - b) Travel Advice and other travel related general information should be handled as separate items.
 - c) Media reporting, especially social media reporting, requires very rapid and transparent responses. Facilitating the exchange of information, especially with the support of modern information and communication technologies, is of the utmost importance.
 - d) In order to ensure efficient and reliable use of Travel Advice, provisions should be made which enable and facilitate the machine-readable dissemination and/or retrieval of the information.
 - e) Geo-referencing of incidents recorded in a country, with exact time and date, should always be used in order to clearly delineate affected areas and avoid negative impact of the incident in other areas (This may require countries to share and rely on information as some countries will be unable to make their own assessments)
 - f) A common set of definitions for different types of risks, especially in the area of terrorism, is crucial to ensure consistency in Travel Advice.
 - g) Citizens need to know the level of risk (e.g., terrorism) in their own country to compare it with the level of risk they will encounter in the other countries that they are considering visiting. This will allow for a clear assessment and understanding of the risk level in each country.
 - h) The date the Travel Advice was last up-dated and re-issued needs to be recorded on the Travel Advice as well as the maximum period before the next review.
5. It is important to provide and promote the use of evidence-based information to monitor and evaluate the impact of travel advice, thus enabling government agencies to make relevant, accurate and coordinated decisions.

RECOMMENDED STRUCTURE AND CONTENTS OF TRAVEL ADVICE

Section 1. Data on how many people visit the country and if most visits can be described as incident free.

Section 2. Description of the current situation throughout the country: Referencing recent incidents (time and location), places and events to be aware of or to avoid (e.g., protests). Here also set out risks of other kinds of violence as well as areas of petty theft.

A scale map of the country indicating areas identified in the written section mentioned above will assist consumers make informed decisions. The map should use the traffic light

system: Red (areas to avoid), Amber (areas for essential travel only) and Green (generally safe but incidents might still occur).

Advice on alerts or warnings should be given separately from the information assessing the risks by characterizing, as far as possible, the scale, probability or imminence of the problem or event.

- Section 3. Description of the incidence of natural events: their probable location and likely timing in the year (e.g., hurricanes, floods, fires, avalanches).
- Section 4. Description of the incidence of infectious diseases: and related requirements for vaccinations, pointing citizens to medical advice before travelling.
- Section 5. Assessment of the risk of terrorism: The severity of the current level of risk 1-5 should be identified alongside the level of risk in the issuing country. Then a table setting out when and where terrorist incidents occurred, including the numbers of injuries and deaths of foreign nationals over the past 5 years only.
- Section 6. Disclaimer. The purpose of Travel Advice is to provide objective information and help citizens making better-informed decisions about foreign travel. No foreign travel can be guaranteed as fully safe and citizens shall take personal responsibility for any trip they make abroad.

While every care is taken in preparing the Travel Advice, a text referring that “the ENTITY NAME” does not assume any responsibility, including legal responsibility, to those who read the travel advice and who choose to take it into account when making any decisions relating to a particular country, or to those affected by their decisions, should be included.