

US will not apply visa waiver to UAE, says envoy

Number of visas issued for Emiratis to study in the US returned to pre-9/11 levels

- By Samir Salama, Associate Editor
- Published: 15:19 May 16, 2010

Abu Dhabi: The Visa Waiver Program (VWP) member countries are approved by the US Congress and it is very unlikely a member will be added, said US Ambassador to the UAE Richard Olson on Sunday.

When asked if the United States would positively respond to the UAE Government's demand that Emiratis receive the same treatment offered to citizens of 34 countries, including European Union countries and US citizens, who obtain visa on arrival at the UAE ports, he said: "Visa Waiver Program countries are approved by the US Congress."

"There has been no addition in recent years and it is very unlikely a VWP member is added per se," Olson said.

"Emiratis are eligible instead to obtain a 10-year multiple entry visa to the US," Olson said as he introduced a new online visa regime at the US embassy in Abu Dhabi.

He added the United States was committed to secure borders but open doors.

"We are committed to being open to the world, in our trade and commerce and in our cultural, intellectual and citizen exchange," Olson said.

"We are equally committed to ensuring the safety and security of travel to and through the United States, not just for our citizens, but for 50 million visitors to the US annually."

Abu Dhabi US Consul Sean Cooper said to be admitted to the visa waiver programme, a country must meet various security and other requirements such as enhanced law enforcement and security-related data sharing with the United States.

"VWP members are also required to maintain high counterterrorism, law enforcement, border control, and document security standards," he said.

The visa regime enables nationals of 36 participating countries to travel to the United States for tourism or business for stays of 90 days or less without obtaining a visa.

Members of the Federal National Council (FNC) have demanded a diplomatic standard of reciprocal treatment with 34 countries whose citizens are allowed to travel to the UAE and stay for up to 90 days without obtaining a visa.

Olson said the number of visas issued to Emiratis to study in the United States had returned to pre-2001 levels (of approximately 4,000 students).

He said the new online application system helped ensure that the visa paperwork process was complete when an applicant arrives at the embassy or consulate. Wait times for an appointment for interviews had also been reduced, he said.

US visa help: Where you can apply

The US embassy in Abu Dhabi provides non-immigrant visa to Emiratis residing anywhere in the UAE and to third-country nationals residing in Abu Dhabi.

The US consulate general in Dubai provides non-immigrant services to Emiratis and residents of Dubai, Sharjah, Ras Al Khaimah, Fujairah, Ajman, and Umm Al Quwain and to Iranian citizens.

Students and applicants with medical emergencies in Dubai and the northern emirates who need emergency interviews and who cannot be interviewed soon enough at Consulate General Dubai may receive appointments in Abu Dhabi.

Persons traveling for study or medical reasons never need an appointment at Embassy Abu Dhabi.

© Gulf News 2010