

August 12, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW Washington, DC 20520

RE: Request to Expedite the Repatriation of Americans & LPRs Stranded in Yemen Due to COVID-19

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We, the undersigned Yemeni American, Arab-American, American Muslim, and civil liberties organizations, write to express our deep concern that the U.S. Department of State (“State Department”) has not taken all feasible steps necessary to ensure the repatriation of more than 2,000 Americans stranded in Yemen due to the outbreak of COVID-19, and offer several recommendations to guarantee their safe return.

The situation in Yemen is grim as many hospitals are closing in fear of COVID-19 because there are not enough medical care providers or enough protective equipment. Around [20 percent of Yemen’s 333 districts have no medical doctors](#) and many medical staff are leaving the country or avoiding working due to the high risk of infection with little available protection and as the war rages amid the pandemic.

On March 14, 2020, the government of Yemen suspended a majority of international flights as part of its effort to stop the spread of COVID-19. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s borders to Yemen have remained closed since April. While there is some hope that outgoing flights from Sana’a’s international airport will resume beginning August 1, these flights are still subject to cancellation due to new COVID-19 outbreaks or regional tensions. Prior to late July, the State Department did not take any significant actions to repatriate these stranded Americans. The State Department’s own “Coronavirus Repatriation Statistics” fails to mention Yemen as one of the 136 countries and territories it has repatriated Americans from.

Consequently we are concerned about the difficulties American citizens and lawful permanent residents (LPRs) - who want to leave Yemen - face when seeking to renew their expired U.S. passports and other travel documents; as all consular services at the U.S. embassy in Sana’a have been suspended until further notice. Moreover, U.S. embassies and consulates in Riyadh, Cairo and Djibouti have been slow to respond to requests of assistance from U.S. nationals currently awaiting repatriation in Yemen.

Having been stranded in Yemen for nearly five months, it has been reported to our organizations that more than 100 Americans’ and LPRs carry travel documents including passports and green cards that have expired. Without valid U.S. travel documentation these Americans are unable to board flights leaving Yemen if and when they resume. As per our communications with the Yemen Desk staff, the State Department is advising Americans with expired U.S. travel documents that possess a Yemeni passport or secondary travel document to simply wait until borders reopen where they can then go to a U.S. Embassy to renew their passports.

Given the uncertainty in the region due to the ongoing conflict and the uptick in COVID-19 outbreaks worldwide leading to renewed lockdowns, Americans in Yemen face the real risk of elevated exposure to the virus. Additionally, not all U.S. citizens with expired U.S. travel documents are dual citizens of other nations. There are reports that several Americans while traveling abroad in Yemen have given birth and are unable to easily procure travel documents for their newborn children.

For these Americans, they are stranded in Yemen through no fault of their own and they lack information as to when the embassy in Sana'a may reopen. The current position of the State Department seems to be that it will not extend American citizens and LPRs any special accommodations to renew their travel documents despite this sensitive security situation. Yet, that is exactly what it should be doing.

We appreciate the work that the U.S. Department of State has done so far to assist Americans stranded in Yemen but believe due to the continued spread of COVID-19 an even greater level of attention and administrative flexibility is required in order to prevent the spread of this deadly virus to Americans who would not otherwise be able to receive adequate treatment in that country.

Moreover, these Americans have been stranded in Yemen for such a prolonged period of time that many have reported to our organizations they exhausted their personal financial resources and unable to afford flights home – which can cost well over \$1,800 per ticket – should they become available for purchase.

In order to expedite the return home of all Americans stranded in Yemen, including those with expired travel documentation, **we request the U.S. State Department implement the two following repatriation policies:**

1. Adopt the innovative and expedited process of handling consular requests in Yemen through secured online video conferencing that can be verified secondarily through electric correspondence, cross-checking of U.S. government databases, and in-person validation by U.S. consular staff once an American traveler arrives at a point of transfer in a country where the U.S. maintains an active embassy or consulate.
2. Immediately provide financial assistance to those individuals in the form of an evacuation promissory note that can be paid back in full overtime.

Finally, we request a video conference meeting with your office, the leadership of the Department of State's Yemen Desk and U.S. Embassy in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to further address these pressing concerns.

We look forward to the Department of State's reprioritization of bringing home Americans stranded in Yemen and response to these recommendations.

Sincerely,

Arab American Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC)
Asian Americans Advancing Justice, Asian Law Caucus (ALC)
Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)
CAIR California
CAIR-Chicago
CAIR-New York
CAIR Michigan
Yemeni American Association of California
Yemeni Alliance Committee
Yemeni American Merchants Association