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Travel Warning

United States Department of State
Bureau of Consular Affairs
Washington, DC 20520

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ISRAEL, THE WEST BANK AND GAZA

August 29, 2006

This Travel Warning is being issued to update information on the general security environment in Israel, Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip, and to reiterate threats to American citizens and U.S. interests in those locations. The security situation in northern Israel has improved, with a halt to rocket firing into Israel from southern Lebanon following the August 14 cessation of hostilities between Israel and Hizballah as called for by UN Security Council Resolution 1701. While the cessation of hostilities largely has been honored by both sides, the situation remains tense and a possible resumption of sporadic violence cannot be ruled out. Violent demonstrations and armed conflicts between supporters of the Hamas and Fatah factions and clashes between the Israeli army and Palestinian militants have increased in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Overall conditions of lawlessness prevail in the Gaza Strip, including the recent kidnapping of journalists. Areas of violent conflict shift rapidly and unpredictably. This warning supersedes the Travel Warning issued July 19, 2006.

Security conditions have improved in northern Israel with a halt to rocket firing into Israel from southern Lebanon following the August 14 cessation of hostilities between Israel and Hizballah as called for by UN Security Council Resolution 1701. The cessation of hostilities largely has been honored by both sides. However, because the situation remains tense and a possible resumption of sporadic violence cannot be ruled out, the Department of State urges U.S. citizens to remain mindful of security factors when considering travel to Israel and Jerusalem at this time. In addition, the Department of State urges U.S. citizens to defer travel to the West Bank and to avoid all travel to the Gaza Strip.

American citizens in the Gaza Strip should depart immediately, a recommendation the State Department has maintained since the deadly roadside bombing of a U.S. Embassy convoy in Gaza on October 15, 2003. This recommendation includes American journalists and aid workers. U.S. government personnel are currently prohibited from all travel in Gaza. Militants have abducted Western citizens recently, including an American citizen television journalist and a New Zealand citizen cameraman who were working for an American news organization, and terrorist organizations have threatened attacks against U.S. interests.

Violence between the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and militant groups based in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank can flare up without notice in the form of rocket attacks into Israel by Palestinian militants, targeted assassinations of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip by Israeli forces, and ongoing IDF security operations in Gaza and the West Bank. The uncertain security conditions within the West Bank and Gaza continue as well, with the potential for violent protests, kidnappings, including of foreign nationals, and fighting between various armed factions. Daily inter-Palestinian violence in the Gaza Strip has spread to the West Bank. An American citizen was kidnapped and held captive for several hours by armed militants in the West Bank in June 2006.

In recent months, citizens of Western nations, including Americans, involved in pro-Palestinian volunteer efforts were assaulted and injured in the Occupied Territories by Israeli settlers and

harassed by the IDF. Those taking part in demonstrations, non-violent resistance, and “direct action,” are advised to cease such activity for their own safety.

For safety and security reasons, U.S. Government American personnel and dependents are prohibited from traveling to any cities, towns or settlements in the West Bank, except for mission-essential business or other approved purposes. For limited, personal travel, U.S. government personnel and family members are permitted to travel through the West Bank, using only Routes 1 and 90, to reach the Allenby/King Hussein Bridge or the Dead Sea coast near Ein Gedi and Masada. Each such transit requires prior notification to the Consulate General’s security office and must occur during daylight hours. U.S. Government personnel and family members are permitted personal travel on Route 443 between Modi’in and Jerusalem during daylight hours only, also with prior notification. Travel to the Gaza Strip by U.S. Government personnel is prohibited. Private American citizens also should avoid travel to these areas.

All travelers who enter or travel in the Gaza Strip or the West Bank should exercise particular care when approaching and traveling through checkpoints and should expect delays and difficulties. Travelers should also be aware they might not be allowed passage through checkpoints.

Israeli authorities are concerned about a possible increase in suicide bombings in Israel. The April 17 and January 19 suicide bombings in Tel Aviv, the December 5, 2005 suicide bombing in Netanya and a similar incident in Hadera in October 2005 are reminders of the precarious security environment. The U.S. Government has received information indicating that American interests within Israel could be the focus of terrorist attacks. For that reason, American citizens are cautioned that a greater danger may exist in the vicinity of restaurants, businesses, and other places associated with U.S. interests and/or located near U.S. official buildings, such as the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv and the U.S. Consulate General in Jerusalem.

Violent confrontation in Israel between organized criminal elements in public places have involved the use of bombs, grenades, anti-tank missiles, and small arms fire, and have taken place in cities frequented by tourists. In the past several years, some of these incidents have led to the death and injury of innocent bystanders.

The State Department urges American citizens to remain vigilant while traveling anywhere in Jerusalem, especially within the commercial and downtown areas of West Jerusalem. Israeli security services report that they continue to receive information of planned terrorist attacks in and around Jerusalem. In addition, American citizens should stay away from demonstrations and generally avoid crowded public places, such as restaurants and cafes, shopping and market areas and malls, pedestrian zones, public transportation of all kinds, including buses and trains and their respective stations/terminals, and the areas around them. Spontaneous or planned protests within the Old City are possible, especially after Friday prayers. Some of these protests have led to violent clashes.

U.S. government personnel are prohibited from using all public transportation. The Old City of Jerusalem is off-limits to them after dark during the entire week and between the hours of 11:00 A.M. and 2:00 P.M. on Fridays. U.S. government employees are also forbidden from patronizing discos and nightclubs.

Any American Citizen who intends to travel to Israel, Jerusalem, the West Bank or the Gaza Strip in spite of this and prior warnings should carefully review the Consular Information Sheet for Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. That reference describes other potential dangers and difficulties and offers detailed security recommendations. Palestinian-Americans face many additional obstacles and regulations that are described in that document.

Americans who remain in Israel, Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are strongly encouraged to register with the Consular Section of the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv or the Consular Section of U.S. Consulate General in Jerusalem through the State Department’s travel registration website, <https://travelregistration.state.gov>. U.S. citizens who require emergency services may telephone the Consulate General in Jerusalem at (972) (2) 622-7250 or the Embassy in Tel Aviv at (972) (3) 519-7355.

Periodically the Embassy and Consulate General may temporarily suspend public services to review their security posture. As a consequence of the current limitations on official travel to the West Bank, and the prohibition on travel by U.S. government employees to the Gaza Strip, the ability of consular staff to offer timely assistance to U.S. citizens in these areas is extremely limited.

Current information on travel and security in Israel, Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank may be obtained from the Department of State by calling 1-888-407-4747 within the United States, or, from overseas, 1-202-501-4444. U.S. citizens should consult the Consular Information Sheet for Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip; the Middle East and North Africa Public Announcement; and the Worldwide Caution Public Announcement at the Department's Internet website at <http://travel.state.gov>. Up-to-date information on security conditions can also be accessed at <http://usembassy-israel.org.il> or <http://jerusalem.usconsulate.gov>.



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