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Report of the Committee on Relations with the Host Country

Letter dated 16 February 2022 from the Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

The United States has worked tirelessly in recent years to address concerns raised by missions through the Committee on Relations with the Host Country and has shown demonstrable success. While we continue to work with the United Nations and with concerned Member States, we want to set the record straight by highlighting the steps we have taken as host country.

We are ready to assist Member States who may be concerned that a specific visa will not be issued in time for a relevant meeting. We continue to urge individuals to submit visa applications as early as possible, and with all requested application information. This includes details about the purpose of the visit and the dates of meetings the delegate plans to attend. When missions contact the United States Mission a reasonable amount of time beforehand, preferably a month ahead of the meeting, we are almost always able to assist them in securing timely issuance.

In the case of the Russian Federation, we have issued hundreds of visas in a timely manner in recent years, despite a large volume of applications. The numbers are striking. In 2021, the United States issued nearly 250 visas for permanent mission staff and nearly 150 temporary duty visas to the Russian Federation for multilateral work; this far exceeded the number of such permanent mission and temporary duty visas any other Security Council member received in 2021, and indeed, is more than twice the number of permanent mission visas received by any other Security Council member. For the high-level week of the General Assembly and subsequent committee meetings, the Russian Federation requested and received well over 100 temporary duty visas – nearly 50 per cent more visas than one Security Council member and at least five times more visas than the other 12 Council members. These numbers are consistent with the United States' visa issuance in years past; since 2018, the Russian Federation has received as many as, and typically far more, permanent mission visas each year than any other Security Council member.

The processing of such large volumes of visa applications presents significant challenges, particularly under considerable resource limitations. United States consular services are already strained owing to coronavirus disease (COVID-19)



restrictions. In Moscow, we also face extraordinary staffing restrictions imposed on our embassy by the Russian Federation itself.

Over the past year, including through productive dialogue with the United Nations Office of Legal Affairs, the Biden Administration has focused significant attention on addressing timely visa issuances for delegations. While the United States Mission is in constant contact with the Russian Mission in this effort, we have unfortunately found that information from the Russian Mission about specific visa cases has often been inaccurate or misleading, hampering progress on visa issuance. Claims about unissued visas have included individuals who have not actually applied or have withdrawn applications, have not replied to our requests for required information, or have applied or raised concerns with our mission only days before intended travel. Within the last month, we received a diplomatic note from the Russian Mission complaining that we had not issued several visas for a meeting that delegations had already been informed would be cancelled at the time the note was sent.

In 1947, in authorizing the President to bring the Headquarters Agreement of the United Nations into effect, both the United States House of Representatives and the United States Senate recognized in their congressional reports that serving as host country to the United Nations “involves inevitably the admission of a number of aliens, some of whom would not normally be admissible under immigration laws of the United States.” But as the Secretary-General of the United Nations explained in 1953: “[F]rom the United Nations point of view it should be recognized that a person should be excluded from the host country if there is clear and convincing evidence that he intends, in bad faith, to use his trip as a cover for activities against that country’s security.” (E/2492, 27 July 1953). The Secretary-General went on to state that when a visa “serves to cover another activity in the United States which is considered to be against the security interest of the country,” that “would, in fact, represent an abuse which would be against the interests of the United Nations, and, therefore, in fact, against the spirit of the Headquarters Agreement.” (E/2501, 1 August 1953).

In that light, the United States is compelled to bring to your attention the Russian Federation’s exploitation of its Permanent Mission to insert personnel into the United States for unauthorized purposes. This is unacceptable and undermines the integrity of the United Nations, and we would urge you to address this issue with the Russian Federation. As we have previously stressed to members of the Committee on Relations with the Host Country, applying for visas to travel to New York under the Agreement for any purpose other than United Nations business is unacceptable, as this wastes valuable resources; is adverse to the interests of the United States, all other Member States, and the United Nations; and undermines legitimate United Nations business.

Despite this exploitation, the Russian Federation has called for you to invoke arbitration. Such calls are divisive and counterproductive. The United States has made significant progress as a result of the consultations between the United Nations Office of Legal Affairs and the United States Department of State, and is committed to making further progress on visas and other matters through this channel. Other issues that have been raised in the Committee on Relations with the Host Country plainly could not justify arbitration. We have made clear that the closure of Russia’s recreational property in Upper Brookville, New York, is a bilateral matter that does not implicate our role as the host country. In addition, the United States has consistently demonstrated its commitment to facilitating members’ access to the United States banking system to pay their United Nations dues. In each case where a Member State has raised such a difficulty, we have taken appropriate action to facilitate payment, sometimes within as little as two weeks.

The United States Mission wishes to emphasize that its host country office is dedicated to addressing any and all host country-related concerns brought to us by members or United Nations personnel, and should be the first point of contact on host country concerns. If issues are unable to be resolved through this channel of communication, then the United States welcomes further discussion in the Committee on Relations with the Host Country. We would request the assistance of the United Nations in directing Member States to these appropriate forums and in establishing the expectation that concerns should be raised with the United Nations or the Committee on Relations with the Host Country only after the United States has been given reasonable opportunity to address them. The channels that we have relied on in the past – with Member States, the United Nations Secretariat, the United Nations Office of Legal Affairs, and the Committee on Relations with the Host Country – have enabled us to respond effectively to concerns and make considerable progress on host country issues, including visa issuances.

The United States is proud of our historic role as host country to the headquarters of the United Nations. For almost 75 years, our priority has been – and will remain – to be a reliable partner to the United Nations, its staff and the diplomats who carry out vital work on its premises.

I request that you circulate the present letter as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 167.

(Signed) Linda **Thomas-Greenfield**

Ambassador

Representative of the United States to the United Nations
