

## Department of Homeland Security Introduces New Procedure to Expedite Honduran Removals

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The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) today announced plans with the Government of Honduras to facilitate the deportation process to that country. Acting Under Secretary for Border and Transportation Security (BTS) Randy Beardsworth at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) joined Minister Rene Becerra, High Commissioner for Immigrant Affairs for the Presidency of Honduras, in announcing the use of video teleconferencing (VTC) by Honduran consular officers for travel document interviews with Honduran nationals detained in the U.S.

Honduras becomes the first foreign government to agree to implement the VTC process, which has a goal of decreasing detention time for Honduran nationals who qualify for Expedited Removal (ER) from the current average of 27 days to an average of 15 days. The use of VTC will quicken the ER process by reducing the need for consular officers to travel to remote facilities as well as allow Honduran consular officers more time to devote to the travel document adjudication process.

The ER process allows DHS the ability to speed the removal of illegal aliens attempting to enter the U.S. by using fraudulent documents or by attempting to elude U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents. When an alien is placed into expedited removal proceedings by a CBP agent, the alien is transferred into U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) custody and then removed to his or her country of origin as soon as circumstances will allow.

"We are deeply committed to restoring integrity to America's immigration system, and steps to expedite the deportation process are essential to that effort," said Acting BTS Under Secretary Randy Beardsworth. "I commend the Honduran government for their leadership and commitment to working with the Department of Homeland Security on the removal process."

Interviews by Honduran consular officers are a required part of the removal process, and are typically a pre-requisite for the adjudication of travel documents. Without official government issued travel documents, removals often cannot occur.

It is not uncommon for aliens to be detained in the vicinity of where they were taken into DHS custody, which can be a great distance from the nearest Honduran consulate. As a result, representatives from the Honduran consulates travel to the various facilities where aliens who qualify for ER are detained in order to conduct travel document interviews. This process is extremely time consuming and costly for both the U.S. and Honduran governments.

Adoption of VTC for this purpose has been a topic of recent CAMEXPAN meetings. The CAMEXPAN group is comprised of consular representatives from Central America (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua), Mexico and Panama. CAMEXPAN is a forum for the exchange of information and discussion of a broad range of migration issues and matters of concern to embassy representatives and DHS.

In December 2004, the CAMEXPAN group observed the use of VTC at a proceeding with an immigration judge at the Executive Office for Immigration Review in Arlington, Virginia. The CAMEXPAN representatives gave positive reviews to the process following the demonstration and expressed the need to examine country laws regarding face-to-face interviews by the consular officers to determine if VTC is allowed under their respective current laws. Honduras becomes the first of the group to accept the DHS proposal and once implemented will be the first country to have the VTC equipment installed in consulates for this purpose. The VTC equipment for the pilot will be provided by DHS.

Based on discussions with Embassy of Honduras officials, it is anticipated that the VTC equipment and process would be initially set up in two Honduran consulates, Los Angeles and Houston, as a pilot program before expansion. The VTC equipment is already in place at U.S. detention centers.

As of March 31, 2005, there were more than 1,750 Honduran nationals in ICE custody. Honduran nationals are the second largest group by nationality in ICE custody, and represent nine percent of the total ICE detainee population. During the 2004 Fiscal Year, ICE removed 7,911 Honduran nationals; 30 percent were criminal aliens.