

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BUREAU OF DIPLOMATIC SECURITY

DIPLOMATIC SECURITY
SERVES THE FOREIGN
DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY



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DIPLOMATIC SECURITY: SERVES THE FOREIGN DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY



Introduction

The Bureau of Diplomatic Security manages the special protections and privileges afforded to foreign diplomats who reside in and visit the United States. Diplomatic Security ensures that these diplomats are treated fairly, that their embassies, consulates, and other diplomatic missions are well protected, and that they correctly receive and use their diplomatic and consular privileges. Our work not only helps the United States maintain good relations with foreign countries, it also helps ensure that foreign countries fairly treat our U.S. diplomats overseas.

Of all countries, the United States hosts the highest number of persons who are entitled to some degree of diplomatic privilege and immunity, one of the oldest principles of foreign relations. As a matter of international law, our responsibility for serving diplomats and their embassies stems directly from the Vienna Conventions on Diplomatic Relations, signed in 1961, and on Consular Relations, signed in 1963.

The foreign diplomatic community residing in the United States numbers more than 128,000 people—including diplomats, consular officers, and staff members of international organizations and their family members. Most of these persons are entitled to some degree of immunity; however, there are different categories of persons within a diplomatic mission, some of whom enjoy greater immunities and privileges than others. Only about 20,000 are given the highest level of diplomatic immunity.

As with diplomats serving throughout the world, foreign diplomats living in the United States receive varying degrees of immunity from prosecution as well as tax, customs, and other benefits. **Privileges and immunities are extended to ensure the efficient and effective performance of official missions on behalf of their governments, not to benefit individuals. Most of these privileges and immunities are not absolute.**



Within the Bureau of Diplomatic Security, the Office of Foreign Missions and the Protective Liaison Division (PL) provide services to the diplomatic community residing in the United States.

The Office of Foreign Missions

- 🎯 The Office of Foreign Missions seeks to:
- 🎯 Protect the national security interests of the United States,
- 🎯 Guard the public from abuse of diplomatic privileges and immunities,
- 🎯 Press for the fair treatment of U.S. diplomats abroad, and
- 🎯 Provide services to the foreign diplomatic community in the United States.



Created by Congress in 1982 when it passed the Foreign Missions Act, the Office of Foreign Missions uses reciprocity as its primary tool in seeking improvement in the treatment of U.S. missions and personnel abroad. Through its control over diplomats' motor vehicles, tax and customs benefits, property, and travel, the Office of Foreign Missions both regulates their privileges and benefits for reciprocity and security reasons, and provides these benefits effectively and efficiently to the diplomatic community.

Diplomatic Motor Vehicles

One of the most widely recognized programs managed by the Office of Foreign Missions deals with motor vehicles. The most visible symbol of this program is the diplomatic license plates issued by the Office of Foreign Missions. To ensure that diplomats are qualified drivers and that their vehicles are mechanically safe and carry adequate levels of insurance, the Office of Foreign Missions issues driver's licenses, vehicle titles, and registration.



Travel Restrictions

The Office of Foreign Missions monitors travel by foreign diplomats within the United States based on national security and reciprocity. Members of certain diplomatic missions are required to obtain permission before traveling within the United States and others are required simply to notify the Office of Foreign Missions of their travel plans.

Property, Customs, and Tax Exemption

The Office of Foreign Missions also works with foreign missions in the United States on property, customs, and tax exemption issues. Foreign missions are required by law to obtain permission from the Office of Foreign Missions before they may purchase, lease, sell, or renovate

real estate. The Office of Foreign Missions also provides guidance to foreign missions in their dealings with local governments in these matters. The Office of Foreign Missions reviews applications for the duty-free importation of official and personal shipments and resolves related problems. In accordance with international law and reciprocity, the diplomatic tax exemption program ensures the correct exemption for foreign missions and their members from sales, utility, vehicle sale, and fuel taxes.



Foreign diplomats must comply with U.S. laws and regulations but, due to international law, most cannot be prosecuted in the United States without a waiver of immunity from their own country. In the case of minor offenses, the Office of Foreign Missions may rescind certain privileges. For instance, if a diplomat has many traffic violations, the Office of Foreign Missions can revoke driving privileges. For more serious offenses, the diplomat may be requested to depart the country. In one case, the Office of Foreign Missions expelled a diplomat who had committed customs fraud by reselling cigarettes purchased without paying taxes.

In all serious cases, the Department of State requests a waiver from the offending diplomat's government so that the diplomat can be prosecuted in the United States.

Protective Liaison Division

The Protective Liaison Division (PL) coordinates protection of all foreign officials and their embassies, consulates, and other diplomatic missions in the United States. This protection is based not on reciprocity, but an assessment of risk, that is, the threat to the mission or individual while in the United States.

All foreign missions in the United States are provided with some police coverage and are identified to local police departments as sensitive locations for priority police response. To provide this security, PL works closely with the U.S. Secret Service Uniformed Division, state and local police departments, and other federal law enforcement authorities.

PL also offers a broad range of security services to the diplomatic community. Each year, PL makes hundreds of visits to foreign embassies and consulates throughout the United States to discuss and resolve security issues. PL conducts outreach programs to disseminate information to state and local law enforcement agencies about the protections that diplomatic immunity gives diplomats and consular officials.

EMBASSY
OF
ETHIOPIA

3506 INTERNATIONAL DRIVE NW



Contact Us

For more information about the Office of Foreign Missions, please visit: www.state.gov/ofm

Write: Office of Foreign Missions
3507 International Place, NW
Washington, DC 20522-3302

Email: OFMINFO@state.gov

For services and assistance to the foreign diplomatic community residing in the United States with travel, property, banking, diplomatic motor vehicle, or tax and customs, please call (202) 895-3500

OFM Regional Offices

Chicago	(312) 353-5762
Houston	(713) 272-2865
Los Angeles	(310) 235-6292
Miami	(305) 442-4943
New York	(212) 826-4500
San Francisco	(415) 744-2910

The Protective Liaison Division may be contacted in Washington, DC, at (202) 895-3600 during normal business hours. After-hours and emergency notifications may be made 24 hours daily to the Diplomatic Security Command Center; call (571) 345-3146 or toll free 1-866-217-2089.



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