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# United States Senate

March 17, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

I write with urgent concern for a number of my constituents, many of them young students, currently stuck in various countries around the world due to COVID-19.<sup>1</sup> In more and more countries, commercial flights are not available as borders shut down, leaving Massachusetts and other U.S. residents stranded and with little to no guidance from U.S. Embassies and Consulates on the ground.<sup>2</sup> I urge the Department to prioritize services for U.S. citizens currently overseas by immediately forming a task force devoted to American Citizen Services. Additionally, the Department must staff up all COVID-19 related American Citizen Services in Washington and worldwide, and quickly implement robust backup plans for posts that are overwhelmed with U.S. citizen requests for guidance and assistance.

I have constituents calling in from around the world, including in Morocco, where groups of young students reached out to the Department of State only to be told “call the airlines,” when no outbound flights existed. Even though there are now commercial flights available for the next two days, the lack of coherent, timely, and focused advice and assistance to my constituents leaves me worried that their government is not there for them with guidance and in some countries, a way out, as commercial travel shuts down.<sup>3</sup> This will continue to happen as COVID-19 spreads around the globe. My constituents are also reporting that many of their friends and colleagues from other countries are being evacuated by their governments regardless of commercial flight availability, leaving U.S. citizens to wonder why their government is not doing the same.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Eliopoulos, *Mass. couple among thousands stranded in Morocco due to coronavirus travel restrictions*, WCVB News (Mar. 17, 2020), <https://www.wcvb.com/article/massachusetts-couple-among-thousands-stranded-in-morocco-due-to-covid-19-coronavirus-travel-restrictions/31685583>

<sup>2</sup> Dawn Gilbertson, *Travel ban aftershocks: American, United, Delta slashing Europe flights*, USA Today (Mar. 12, 2020), <https://www.usatoday.com/story/travel/airline-news/2020/03/12/coronavirus-europe-travel-ban-fallout-airlines-cancel-more-flights/5031305002/>

<sup>3</sup> Nada Altaher & Barry Neild, *Emergency flights authorized after Morocco flight ban*, CNN (Mar. 17, 2020), <https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/coronavirus-morocco-flights-canceled/>

<sup>4</sup> *Coronavirus: Which countries have evacuated their citizens?*, BBC News (Jan. 30, 2020), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-51312378>

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It is imperative that the United States moves urgently to protect U.S. citizens worldwide during the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout this crisis, the Trump administration has shied away from exerting U.S. leadership and encouraging global coordination. I urge you to quickly demonstrate U.S. leadership by increasing diplomatic cooperation and promoting global coordination on all fronts necessary to protect all U.S. citizens and permanent residents, worldwide.

I urge you to immediately form a task force devoted to coordinating American Citizen Services' response to the worldwide threat of COVID-19. Additionally the Department must take steps to ensure adequate staffing in Washington and worldwide, as it appears posts in some locations are becoming overwhelmed and do not have the capacity to quickly assist U.S. citizens requesting information and assistance, as is the case in Morocco right now.<sup>5</sup> As you know, all Foreign Service Officers (FSO's) are required to receive consular training and therefore have the skills to assist their consular colleagues to respond to this unprecedented challenge. FSO's from all sections at overseas posts and all bureaus in Washington should be leveraged accordingly.

I appreciate your attention to the most urgent needs of my constituents in Morocco, and elsewhere as other issues become apparent. In the meantime, to prepare for further COVID-19 related travel disruptions worldwide, and to understand the Administration's planned actions to address these needs, I request answers to the following questions by March 24, 2020:

1. What plans do you have to supplement American Citizen Services in Morocco, where things are becoming increasingly dire after the government closed its borders?
2. Will the Department evacuate U.S. citizens, legal permanent residents, and their family members, if requested, in the absence of commercial flight availability in any country suffering a COVID-19 outbreak?
3. How is the Department supporting overseas posts that are experiencing high loads of requests for American Citizen Services? When will you set up a task force specifically focused on American Citizen Services for the COVID-19 outbreak, and distribute contact information to the public?
4. What happens if a sick U.S. citizen presents for evacuation? What are your contingency plans for such an instance?

I look forward to your timely and detailed responses. If you have any questions about these requests, please contact Sarah Trister of my staff at 202-224-2742.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator

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<sup>5</sup> Peter Eliopoulos, *Mass. couple among thousands stranded in Morocco due to coronavirus travel restrictions*, WCVB News (Mar. 17, 2020), <https://www.wcvb.com/article/massachusetts-couple-among-thousands-stranded-in-morocco-due-to-covid-19-coronavirus-travel-restrictions/31685583>