

Minister of
Foreign Affairs



Ministre des
Affaires étrangères

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0G2

JAN 10 2019

The Honourable Kevin Sorenson, P.C., M.P.
Chair
Standing Committee on Public Accounts
House of Commons
Ottawa ON K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. Sorenson:

Pursuant to the House of Commons Standing Order 108(3)(g), please accept this as the Government Response to the Fiftieth Report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, entitled "Report 7, Consular Services for Canadians Abroad: Global Affairs Canada of the 2018 Spring Reports of the Auditor General of Canada".

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and the members of the Standing Committee for your commitment to improve the Government of Canada's provision of consular services to help safeguard Canadians travelling and living abroad, especially in vulnerable circumstances.

The government will continue to improve consular services to ensure they are effective, efficient and respect the privacy of Canadians we serve. We recognize the need to deliver consular services both in exceptional circumstances as well as through the timely routine services needed by the majority of Canadians abroad.

As such, we agree with the seven recommendations in the Fiftieth Report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and have endeavoured to address the recommendations as we continue to modernize the delivery of consular services to Canadians. The requested progress report for all seven recommendations is enclosed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be "C. Freeland".

The Honourable Chrystia Freeland, P.C., M.P.

Enclosure

Canada

**GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE FIFTIETH REPORT OF THE STANDING
COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS, ENTITLED, “REPORT 7, CONSULAR
SERVICES FOR CANADIANS ABROAD: GLOBAL AFFAIRS CANADA OF THE 2018
SPRING REPORTS OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL OF CANADA”**

RECOMMENDATION 1

That, within 120 days of the presenting of this report, Global Affairs Canada present the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts with a report outlining the progress made regarding 1) cataloguing and implementing the recommendations of lessons-learned reports; and 2) developing a communications and outreach strategy, including an analysis of specific types of travellers to inform Canadians about international travel risks and what consular services are available in times of crisis.

Global Affairs Canada agrees with this recommendation and recognizes the important role of lessons learned reports in continually improving emergency response for Canadians following a significant emergency response event requiring activation of our Emergency Response Team (ERT). As such, Global Affairs Canada has implemented a standardized approach to lessons learned to improve its ability to respond to future emergency or crisis situations abroad. This approach includes a simplified and streamlined report process and ongoing tracking of recommendations and their implementation to ensure lessons learned are more consistently captured, assessed and implemented across different types of emergencies. The new approach was used following the Department’s response to Hurricanes Florence and Isaac in September 2018.

A consular crisis communications plan has also been developed outlining proactive approaches to communicating travel risks during summer travel, hurricane season, winter and spring break travel. Targeted messages will be communicated using a variety of channels including media technical briefings, statements, targeted outreach to media, and to Canadians following on social media channels. This approach was implemented in the 2018 hurricane season.

RECOMMENDATION 2

That, by October 31, Global Affairs Canada present the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts with a report outlining the progress made regarding 1) reviewing and updating its travel advisories in accordance with its 18-month mandatory cyclical review (MCR) policy; and 2) improving its communications and outreach strategy to best target at-risk travellers with information based on an analysis of their needs.

Global Affairs Canada agrees with this recommendation and values the importance of providing up-to-date travel information to Canadians about safe travel abroad. A response to this recommendation was submitted by October 31, 2018, in a letter from Minister Freeland to the Chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, the Honourable Kevin Sorenson.

Updates to travel advice pages are published on a 24/7 continual basis as situations warrant and in real-time. The Department has enhanced its efforts and increased its resources to ensure that the travel advice pages are reviewed in accordance with the Department's 18-month mandatory cyclical review schedule. The review process has been assessed and updated to ensure it efficiently verifies the content of the travel advice pages, including research and comparison with like-minded countries, editing, translating and publishing online. As a result of these measures, since January 1, 2018, (as at November 13, 2018) 122 travel advice pages have been updated and 2019 cyclical reviews will take place on schedule.

Global Affairs Canada has developed an enhanced communications plan. In order to improve our knowledge of consular clients and our communications and outreach to them, a baseline assessment of over 23,000 client records was conducted and included a breakdown by age, gender, country and type of service provided. This type of demographic segmentation enables us to target at-risk travellers ahead of their journey and to optimize service delivery based on their needs.

Public opinion research was conducted in 2017-2018 with Canadian travellers to better understand their preparations for travel, the information they need and their expectations of consular services, as well as the channels they use to access such information. Based on the findings of the above analyses, Global Affairs Canada has developed a consular communications and outreach strategy and has started implementing targeted initiatives on an ongoing basis, including campaigns on travel preparedness during hurricane season, winter and spring break travel, mental health, sexual assault, and consular profiles of consular officers delivering services to Canadians abroad.

RECOMMENDATION 3

That, within 120 days of the presenting of this report, Global Affairs Canada present the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts with a report outlining the progress made regarding 1) reviewing and strengthening its quality control process to ensure its consular officers contact and offer to help Canadians who have been arrested or detained, with a focus on those who may be at greater risk because of who or where they are; and 2) dedicated, cyclical training on arrest and detention cases throughout consular officers' careers, including how to conduct prison visits and provide tools for detecting incidents of torture, abuse, or mistreatment.

Global Affairs Canada agrees with this recommendation and has, since April 2018, taken a series of specific measures to enhance our quality control mechanisms and enforce the application of consistent service standards. The Department has revitalized internal engagement and communications with Canada's consular officers in order to provide improved assistance to Canadians arrested or detained abroad.

We are also now leveraging business intelligence tools to enhance data analysis with additional resources allocated to monitor data quality. The need for strengthening quality control and modernity has also been built into new business requirements for the current case management system enabling the program to better track service standards.

Global Affairs Canada recognizes the need for targeted training and tools that take into account the different operating environments where consular officers work, which can include engagement with police forces, immigration officials, prison authorities, and regional and provincial governments. These contexts can put our staff in challenging situations. We are committed to ensuring their safety and that of Canadians they are assisting. Regional training initiatives devoted to arrest and detention and mistreatment and torture are being offered to consular officers abroad in various geographic locations between October 2018 and March 2019. An additional full-time resource was added to the consular training team in September 2018 to develop new tools, such as online training, allowing officers to renew their training on a regular basis.

In addition, the types of additional tools needed to support the management of cases involving allegations of mistreatment and torture have been identified and development has begun. These include a new procedure to ensure that the Minister is informed formally and promptly of allegations of torture, which was developed and implemented in June 2018.

RECOMMENDATION 4

That, within 120 days of the presenting of this report, Global Affairs Canada present the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts with a report outlining the progress made regarding 1) examining the reasons for performance variations in passport delivery at its missions abroad in order to improve service delivery; and 2) addressing weaknesses in its data quality for monitoring performance.

A new memorandum of understanding (MOU) governing Global Affairs Canada's delivery of passport services abroad on behalf of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) was signed at the end of July 2018, along with a funding annex, that stipulates increased, predictable, multi-year funding to Global Affairs Canada over the next three fiscal years. The framework also provides for the development of detailed, evergreen annexes (up to 15), including on training, workload, management and performance monitoring. New policies and procedures relevant to measuring and tracking performance standards will be reflected in instructions to consular officers at missions, to address data quality for performance monitoring. In support of improved performance measurement, additional outreach and instructions on reinforcing data quality has been provided to mission consular sections abroad to ensure consistent application of data input rules.

Under the new MOU, Global Affairs Canada and IRCC are working together to address performance variations in passport delivery at missions abroad. Both departments meet regularly to review and discuss performance issues and to determine the source (i.e. volume/workload, resource or program performance.) Coordinated support is provided to address variations (e.g. through additional temporary assistance, training, or program management advice.) In this regard, financial support has been allocated to cover expenses related to emergency employment and overtime costs, temporary duty assignments, and training. Additionally, following a review of consular workloads, 24 new Locally Engaged Staff positions in the highest priority missions were created effective September 1, 2018. As a result of these efforts, there have been improvements in meeting performance targets across the network. The data examined during the audit indicated that for the period of January 1, 2016 to June 30, 2017, four of the ten highest volume missions did not meet the performance target of delivering at least 90% of passports within 20 business days. As of October 2018, nine of the ten highest volume missions now meet this service standard. A comprehensive, multi-phase plan has been put in place by Global Affairs Canada and IRCC to address remaining issues on a mission by mission basis.

For the longer term, Global Affairs Canada is supporting IRCC in its development of a new passport processing system. In line with this recommendation, both departments are looking to develop an efficient system that will enable officers to meet service standards, and that will support robust performance monitoring and reporting.

RECOMMENDATION 5

That, within 120 days of the presenting of this report, Global Affairs Canada present the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts with a report on the results of the updated monitoring system, including its delivery of temporary passports and emergency travel documents to assess performance in meeting travellers' requirements.

To enable performance tracking of urgent travel documents against the traveller's requirement (e.g. travel date), Global Affairs Canada has defined the business requirements and is making the necessary technical adjustments to the current consular case management system. Further, the distribution of client feedback forms to clients requesting urgent travel documents will be standardized to provide additional information on traveller requirements.

RECOMMENDATION 6

That, within 120 days of the presenting of this report, Global Affairs Canada present the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts with a report outlining the progress made regarding 1) updating its performance standards for the delivery of key consular services across its missions; and 2) reviewing the level of consular resources allocated across its missions to ensure an effective, consistent level of service to Canadians abroad.

Global Affairs Canada has redefined its performance standards for the delivery of key consular services across all missions in consultation with consular officers and key stakeholders. The revised standards reflect client relevance and are measurable. When finalized, the service standards will be posted on the Government of Canada's travel information website travel.gc.ca and at missions abroad, in order to inform Canadians and manage their expectations. The consular service standards will be reviewed at least every five years.

Global Affairs Canada's current resource allocation tool was recently updated with 2017-18 data. The findings from the tool are considered when making decisions with regards to consular resource allocation.

In order to strengthen the tool, we have consulted with other Global Affairs Canada programs and missions abroad to identify country-specific factors that impact consular workload. To improve the accuracy and consistency of the data that is considered when addressing consular resource levels, a data quality improvement plan is currently in development. This new, reformulated tool will provide comprehensive data to inform recommendations regarding consular resource needs abroad.

RECOMMENDATION 7

That, within 120 days of the presenting of this report, Global Affairs Canada present the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts with a report outlining the progress made regarding 1) updating the cost method it uses to support the consular service fee and its funding arrangements; and 2) updating its performance information for the consular service fee.

Global Affairs Canada agrees with this recommendation and recognizes that it is important to ensure that consular services fees are underpinned by a robust costing methodology. In response to the audit findings the Department has completed a detailed review of the methodology used to calculate the costs of delivering consular services in 2018, in order to ensure that Global Affairs Canada can make a reliable assessment of the costs.

As a result of the review, refinements to the methodology for assessing the cost of consular services will be made for next fiscal year. These include, among others, modifications to the model to ensure that direct costs that clearly relate to consular services are included, that indirect costs are reflected more accurately, and that a consistent approach to apportioning personnel costs for consular officers is adopted. Updates to the model will help ensure a consistent and reliable estimate and will allow Global Affairs Canada to accurately identify the total costs of consular services.

As mentioned under recommendation 6, Global Affairs Canada has modernized its performance standards for the delivery of key consular services across all missions in consultation with consular officers and key stakeholders. In parallel with the introduction of the revised service standards, the Department will take additional measures to improve tracking and monitoring of performance against these standards, including by providing instructions and training consular officers on the enhanced use of the current case management systems for this purpose. Finally, Global Affairs Canada's new IT solution for case management, the Case, Contact and Emergency Management system (CCEM) being developed for an anticipated deployment in 2020 will include robust means of tracking and monitoring of performance against standards.