

U.S. EMBASSY – MANILA

American Citizen Services

September 2004

US Embassy Opens Virtual Consulate of Davao

What is the Virtual Consulate of Davao?

The US Government will extend its engagement in the City of Davao by launching a virtual consulate in October 2004. The purpose is to further support American citizens who have an interest in Davao, as well as to foster increased cultural and commercial relationships with the United States. The virtual consulate will produce deeper and more productive relationships with varied audiences in Davao by combining traditional outreach with new media including a Virtual Consulate Davao Web site.

Why has the United States chosen Davao as the first location for this virtual consulate?

Davao City has the 2nd highest population in the Philippines, plus a large community of American citizen residents. The US Government already has an Embassy in Manila (Luzon) and a limited presence in Cebu (Visayas) through a consular agent. Davao -- and the Mindanao region-- is a natural first choice for us to launch the first virtual consulate in the Philippines, with its unique cultural, linguistic, ethnic and geographical characteristics.

Why don't you just open a "real" consulate instead of this virtual consulate?

The US Government has no plans to open additional buildings to house consulates in the Philippines. The virtual consulate will allow many of the benefits of a physical consulate to be achieved through other means. An electronic communications channel will enable most questions to be answered quickly and efficiently. A virtual principal officer (VPO) will coordinate the US Government's engagement in Davao and ensure that the virtual consulate supports the American-Filipino bilateral relationship. US Government personnel will visit Davao regularly and augment existing programs.

What services can be obtained through the Virtual consulate?

A virtual consulate offers many of the same benefits of a physical consulate. For instance:

- A contact point to answer general questions.
- Information and guidance specific to local American and Filipino residents.
- Interaction with consular officers via scheduled live chat sessions online.
- Guidance for visitors to Davao about services that are available in the city.
- Promotion of key elements of the bilateral relationship between Davao and the US.

Is the Virtual Consulate just a Web site?

No. The Web site is just one visible element of the virtual consulate through which the public can see current and planned activities in Davao. The website is augmented by many other programs, including frequent travel to Davao, outreach programs, cultural exchange programs, and commercial exchanges between Philippine business interests and US.

What other Virtual Consulates are planned and when will they open?

We expect to open additional virtual consulates in 2005. The exact location and timing for these have not yet been determined.

When is the next visit by Embassy staff to Davao City?

The next outreach will coincide with the official launch of the virtual consulate on October 6, 2004. Please refer to our online engagement calendar for updates regarding Embassy visits to Davao City.

The website address is: www.usvirtualconsulatedavao.org.ph

American Citizen Services

New ACS Chief

Christopher Rowan took over as Chief of American Citizen Services in mid-August. Chris has just completed two years as Nonimmigrant Visa Chief. He and his family are at the halfway point in a four-year tour. He's served previously at our Embassies in Muscat, Oman; Sofia, Bulgaria; and Asmara, Eritrea, as well as in Washington at the Department of State. Prior to joining the U.S. Foreign Service, Chris was a banker based in New York. Prior to that, he was on active duty with the U.S. Marine Corps, and just retired from the Marine Corps Reserve in July.

Those of you who attended the Angeles / Olongapo outreach in August may have seen Chris -- he worked alongside our ACS colleagues to provide services to over 200 citizens those two days.

A few words from Chris:

"The Philippines and the United States have a broad and deep relationship, and we see evidence of it in every aspect of consular work here in the Philippines. The American Citizen Services Unit is no exception: both the size and diversity of the American citizen community are impressive. We have a dedicated group of officers and consular assistants here to provide an excellent level of service. I'm amazed at the number and type of emergency cases we see every week and proud of how my colleagues work to resolve problems every day. We also provide thousands of routine services every month, such as passport processing, which benefits from new technology. As many of you know, we now transmit passport applications to the U.S. for high-speed processing, enabling you to receive passports in a matter of days.

If you are a U.S. citizen reading this and have not registered with the U.S. Embassy, please do so -- it's just gotten a lot easier to do -- you may walk in, or fax an application, or even register on-line using:

<https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/>

My family and I love it here, and we are looking forward to the next two years. I hope to have a chance to meet many of you while in this position."

American Citizen Services U.S. Embassy 1201 Roxas Blvd. Ermita, Manila, Philippines

Office: 63-2-528-6300
x2246/2555

Fax: 632-522-3242

Passports and Birth Registration

Mon thru Fri 8:00am - 11:00am
2-879-4747

Notary Services

Mon, Wed & Fri 8:00 - 11:00am

Legal Capacity to Marry

Mon thru Fri 8:00am - 9:00am

EMERGENCIES: For emergencies after hours please call 63-2-528-6300 and ask for the Duty Officer.

Website:

<http://www.phillippines.usembassy.gov>

Email:

acsinfomanila@state.gov

Don't Forget!

US General Election

is on

November 2, 2004

United States General Election 2004

Effective August 30 through October 20, American citizens can send voter registration cards (**FPCAs**, a federal requirement for voting abroad); and absentee ballots to the United States free of charge at the following Fedex and Air-21 drop off locations:

1. *Makati City*. Park Square, Ayala Center. Phone: (632) 867-4242 / (632) 813-3397
2. *Quezon City*. Galleria-Ortigas , 4/L Robinsons Galleria , EDSA cor. Ortigas Ave. Phone: (632) 632-9849
3. *Quezon City*. 701 EDSA cor New York Ave., Cubao. Phone: (632) 722-0736 to 37
4. *Muntinlupa*. Alabang Town Center, Corte Delas Palmas. Phone: (632) 772-3225
5. *Cainta, Rizal*. Sta. Lucia East Grand Mall, 2/F Bldg. 2 Sta. Lucia East, Grand Mall Felix Ave. cor. Marcos Highway. Phone: (632) 681-8522
6. *Bacoor, Cavite*. Suites 134 & 136 Maraudi Bldg. Niog cor. Aguinaldo Highway. Phone: (046) 971-0516 to 17
7. *Balibago, Angeles City*. G/F Savers Mall, McArthur Hi-way. Phone: (045) 322-7739
8. *Subic Bay, Freeport Zone, Olongapo*. Bldg. 8131 Palm St., Argonaut Highway CUBI Point. Phone: (047) 252-7575
9. *Dagupan City, Pangasinan*. Unit 1 Lioanag Bldg., Perez blvd. Phone: (075) 522-7471
10. *Lahug, Cebu*. US Consular Agency Cebu, Waterfront Hotel. Phone: (032) 231-1261
11. *La Paz, Iloilo City*. Unit G21F, Gaisano City Mall, Luna St., Phone: (033) 509-0810
12. *Bajada, Davao City*. Expressworld, Inc., Dr. 3 L&R Bldg., JP Laurel Avenue. Phone: (082) 222-1264 to 65

Operating hours at Fedex and Air 21 vary; please contact locations for specific times.

Americans may also submit the FPCAs and absentee ballots to the US Embassy on Roxas Blvd in Ermita, Manila, Monday-Friday, 7:30am-4:30pm for free delivery via the US postal service. For further inquiries, please contact Embassy voting assistance officers at 528-6300, extension 2246 or 2555.

For more information, please refer to the US Embassy website at:

<http://usembassy.state.gov/manila/wwwaha012.html> or <http://www.fvap.gov>

Important Reminder: Most states must receive FPCAs 30 days prior to Election Day and absentee ballots must arrive on or before Election Day.

BIOMETRICS HAS ARRIVED IN MANILA!

In the wake of 9-11, Congress passed the Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act of 2002. This new law mandated the use of "biometrics" in US visas. To comply with this law, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) launched the United States Visitor and Immigrant Status Indicator Technology program, more commonly known as "US-VISIT." As part of US-VISIT, DHS initiated the use of a new biometric to supplement digital photos—the biometric long used in US visas. The new biometric selected by DHS is fingerprinting, also known as finger-scanning. The process calls for each visa applicant to have his or her 2 index fingers scanned. It should be noted that this process does not use any ink, but rather the applicant simply places his or her finger on a glass screen and the fingerprint is digitally scanned.

Finger-scanning was first implemented in September 2003, and the present schedule calls for every US visa-issuing embassy and consulate to have finger-scanning equipment operational by October 26, 2004. Finger-scanning requires a major installation of both hardware and software by a team of technicians who travel from the US to each overseas post.

US Embassy Manila plans to have a high-profile launch of the finger-scanning system by inviting a number of prominent Philippine citizens to demonstrate how the system works. Visa applicants will find that finger-scanning is quite simple and should take approximately 15 seconds to accomplish.

When a visa applicant's index fingers are scanned the digital fingerprints are saved in DHS's computer database. When a traveler then arrives at a US port of entry, be it an airport or seaport, the traveler will have his or her 2 index fingers scanned once again on identical equipment at a DHS officer's booth. Using the traveler's name and other data contained on the visa, the fingerprints taken at the port of entry are then compared to the fingerprints taken at

Widow/Widower of US Citizen May be Entitled to File Own Immigrant Visa Petition

The spouse of a deceased US citizen may file an immediate relative petition on their own behalf under Section 201(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, as amended, provided the spouse:

1. was married to the US citizen for at least two years prior to death and was not separated at the time of the death.
2. files a petition under INA 204(a)(1)(A) within two years of the spouse's death; and
3. has not remarried.

In addition, the child of a qualifying widow or widower is also entitled to derivative status if accompanying or following to join the principal beneficiary.

For more information on how to file a I-360 petition, you may visit the US Citizenship and Immigration Service information window (Window 33) Monday through Friday between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 12 noon or by calling 528-6300, extension 2224.

Travel and Living Abroad

Find the latest information about traveling or living abroad by visiting the State Department's website at:

<http://www.state.gov/travel/>

VISA INELIGIBILITIES - PUBLIC CHARGE

“Any alien who, in the opinion of the consular officer at the time of application for a visa...is likely at any time to become a public charge, is inadmissible.”

INA 212(a)(4)(A)

What does Public Charge mean?

The term “public charge” means that an alien, after admission into the United States, is likely to become primarily dependent on the U.S. government for subsistence. This is determined by either the receipt of public cash assistance for income maintenance by the admitted alien, or institutionalization for long-term care at government expense. Confinement in a medical institution for a short period of rehabilitation does not constitute a public charge. Public cash assistance includes supplemental security income (SSI), cash temporary assistance for needy families, and state or local cash assistance programs that provide for income maintenance.

When a consular officer evaluates a visa applicant’s possible ineligibility under the public charge section of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), the officer takes into consideration not only the applicant’s current financial position, but also the overall, complete situation of the applicant. Applicants are not found ineligible based solely upon past or possible future receipt of non-cash or supplemental assistance – this is not the only consideration in determining whether an alien is likely to become a public charge. Additionally, U.S. government assistance that is not primarily for “income maintenance” is not considered by the consular officer in making an ineligibility decision of whether an applicant is likely to become a public charge.

Many forms of U.S. government assistance are of a non-cash and/or supplemental nature. Numerous assistance programs are funded with public funds for the general good, such as public education and child vaccination programs. These are not considered benefits under INA 212(a)(4)(A) that could result in a public charge determination. The underlying nature of each assistance program demonstrates whether it is considered a "public charge." Remember, a public charge program would be one intended as a primary source of cash for income maintenance. Cash benefits that have been earned, such as social security payments, old age survivors disability insurance (OASDI), U.S. government pension benefits, and veterans benefits, are immaterial to a public charge determination.

The public charge section of the INA applies to all aliens seeking entry into the United States. The amount and type of evidence required for immigrant visa applicants is normally much greater than the evidence required in non-immigrant cases. However, in all cases, consular officers base their determination of the likelihood that the applicant will become a public charge on a reasonable future projection of the alien's present circumstances. Consular officers do not refuse visas based on "what if" considerations. For example, a consular officer would not consider whether or not an applicant might lose a job before reaching the intended destination or if the applicant could be faced with a medical emergency. Instead, consular officers assess only the "totality of circumstances" that exist at the time of a visa application. Consular officers evaluate the circumstances which make it not merely possible, but likely, that an applicant will become a public charge. For more information about public charge issues and as a ground of inadmissibility, see the www.uscis.gov website.

TAXATION OF BENEFITS

- **Some people who get Social Security benefits will have to pay taxes on their benefits. This only affects those with substantial income in addition to their Social Security benefits.**
 - ❖ Filing a federal tax return as an "individual":
 - If combined income* is between \$25,000 and \$34,000, 50 % of Social Security benefits may be subject to income tax.
 - If combined income* is above \$34,000, up to 85 % of Social Security benefits is subject to income tax.
 - ❖ Filing a joint tax return:
 - If combined income* is between \$32,000 and \$44,000, 50 % of Social Security benefits may be subject to income tax.
 - If combined income* is more than \$44,000, up to 85 % of Social Security benefits is subject to income tax.

*"Combined" income means adjusted gross income (as reported on Form 1040); plus nontaxable interest, plus one-half of Social Security benefits.

- ❖ At the end of each year, the Social Security Administration (SSA) mails every beneficiary a Social Security Benefit Statement (Form SSA-1099) showing the amount of benefits received. This statement can be used when completing the federal income tax return.
- **About 25% of current Social Security beneficiaries have incomes that exceed the thresholds, requiring them to pay taxes on a portion of their Social Security benefits.**
- **A person can voluntarily elect to have federal taxes withheld from their Social Security benefits** by completing and returning Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Form W-4V (Voluntary Withholding Request) to SSA.
 - ❖ Form W-4V can be found and downloaded from the SSA's website at:
<http://www.socialsecurity.gov/online/#Agencies>.
 - ❖ Form W-4V should also be completed and returned to SSA each time a person wants to make a change or stop tax withholding from their Social Security benefit.

NOTE:

SSA is not an authority on tax matters. For additional information regarding the taxation of Social Security benefits, check the IRS website at: www.irs.gov

Call FedEx

To renew your passport or to register the birth of your U.S. citizen child

(02) 879-4747

For a small fee, FedEx will:

Deliver application forms to you

Pick-up and deliver completed applications and supporting documents to the Embassy

Deliver the Consular Report of Birth Abroad and/or the new US passport to you

REGISTRATION FORM

(Date of Registration: _____)

_____ **PERMANENT**

(More than four months)

_____ **TEMPORARY**

(Four months or less)

FULL NAME: <small>(Last, First, Middle)</small>	SEX:
DATE & PLACE OF BIRTH:	SS NUMBER:
COLOR OF EYES:	HEIGHT:
COLOR OF HAIR:	WEIGHT (lbs.):
LOCAL ADDRESS IN PHILIPPINES:	PHONE NO.:
U.S. ADDRESS:	PHONE NO.:
OCCUPATION:	
COMPANY NAME:	PHONE NO.:
COMPANY ADDRESS:	FAX NO.:
E-MAIL ADDRESS:	US PPT. NO.:
EMERGENCY CONTACT:	RELATIONSHIP:
EMERGENCY ADDRESS:	PHONE NO.:
DEPENDENTS' INFORMATION:	
<u><i>Name</i></u>	<u><i>Relationship</i></u>
<u><i>Date of Birth.</i></u>	<u><i>Passport Number</i></u>
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Please attach a copy of the biographic page of your passport to this form and return it to: US Embassy, 1201 Roxas Blvd., 1000 Manila, Philippines

**YOUR 2 X 2 PHOTO
HERE**

PLEASE SIGN HERE:

FOR ACS STAFF ONLY:
() Entered ACS System Date: _____

Public Announcement

Worldwide Caution

September 10, 2004

U.S. Department of State

This Public Announcement is being updated to remind U.S. citizens of the continuing threat of terrorist actions and anti-American violence against U.S. citizens and interests overseas. This supersedes the Worldwide Caution dated April 29, 2004 and expires on March 10, 2005.

The Department of State is deeply concerned about the continued threat of terrorist attacks against U.S. citizens and interests abroad, as well as the potential for demonstrations and violent actions against U.S. citizens and interests overseas. U.S. citizens are reminded that demonstrations and rioting can occur at any time. In reaction to the execution of hostages in Iraq, there have been demonstrations and associated violence in the hostages' country of origin. While Americans are generally not the targets in such incidents, U.S. citizens could be caught up in the violence. U.S. citizens are reminded to maintain a high level of vigilance and to take appropriate steps to increase their security awareness.

The Department of State remains concerned by indications that al-Qaida and affiliated groups continue to prepare to strike U.S. interests abroad. Al-Qaida and its associated organizations have struck in Europe, Asia and the Middle East. Future al-Qaida attacks could possibly involve non-conventional weapons such as chemical or biological agents as well as conventional weapons of terror, to include explosive devices.

Terrorist actions may include, but are not limited to, suicide operations, assassinations, hijackings, bombings or kidnappings. These may involve aviation and other transportation and maritime interests. Terrorists do not distinguish between official and civilian targets. These may include facilities where U.S. citizens and other foreigners congregate or visit, including residential areas, business offices, clubs, restaurants, places of worship, schools, hotels and public areas. U.S. citizens are encouraged to maintain a high level of vigilance and to take appropriate steps to increase their security awareness.

U.S. Government facilities worldwide remain at a heightened state of alert. These facilities may temporarily close or suspend public services from time to time to assess their security posture. In those instances, U.S. embassies and consulates will make every effort to provide emergency services to U.S. citizens. Americans abroad are urged to monitor the local news and maintain contact with the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate.

As the Department continues to develop information on any potential security threats to U.S. citizens overseas, it shares credible threat information through its consular information program documents, available on the Internet at <http://travel.state.gov>. In addition to information on the Internet, travelers may obtain up-to-date information on security conditions by calling 1-888-407-4747 toll-free in the U.S. or outside the U.S. and Canada on a regular toll line at 1-317-472-2328.

THE PHILIPPINES

April 27, 2004

This Public Announcement is being revised to update travelers about ongoing security concerns in the Philippines, particularly on Mindanao. It supersedes the Public Announcement issued January 16, 2004, and expires on October 29, 2004. The terrorist threat to Americans in the Philippines remains high, and the Embassy continues to receive reports of ongoing activities by known terrorist groups. In view of a number of security-related incidents and the possibility of future terrorism, and other violence or criminal activity, Americans traveling to or residing in the Philippines are urged to exercise great caution and maintain heightened security awareness. The U.S. Embassy urges Americans to avoid crowds, including, among other places, nightclubs and bars, and to exercise special caution in public places or when using public transportation. Extremist groups present in Southeast Asia, such as Jemaah Islamiyah, have demonstrated transnational capabilities to carry out attacks against locations where Westerners congregate. Terrorist groups do not distinguish between official and civilian targets.

Bombings have claimed many lives and injured hundreds in the Philippines during the past year, particularly on Mindanao. The Department of State continues to receive information that there may be future bombings in the Philippines, including against airports, commercial shipping, passenger vessels and seaports in Mindanao and in other areas. Since March 2003, bombings have occurred at the sports arena in Maguindanao Province, the international airport in Davao, and the Sasa Wharf in Davao City in Mindanao. These bombings have killed at least 48 people, including one American, and injured over 200 others. Other explosive devices have been discovered and defused prior to detonation in these and other areas of Mindanao. A number of bomb-related incidents have also occurred in Metro Manila in recent years. The Government of the Philippines has condemned these incidents as acts of terrorism. The explosion and subsequent sinking of a Superferry on February 27, 2004, in Manila Bay killed more than 100 people. The terrorist group Abu Sanyaf (ASG) has claimed responsibility for this attack and has threatened to target ferries and other shipping interests in the future.

U.S. citizens are urged to defer non-emergency travel to the island of Mindanao due to recurring bombing incidents and threats of other violence and criminal activity, including kidnapping. U.S. citizens should avoid all travel to the islands of Basilan, Tawi-Tawi, and Jolo, located in the Sulu archipelago in the extreme southwest of the Philippines, due to kidnappings and other criminal activity. Americans residing in Mindanao and in the Sulu archipelago should carefully review their security posture, take appropriate action to secure their well-being, and remain in close contact with the Embassy for current information. As a precaution, the U.S. Government has restricted travel by official personnel to these areas, and emergency services to U.S. citizens in these areas may be limited.

The terrorist New People's Army (NPA), the military arm of the Communist Party of the Philippines, operates throughout the Philippines and has issued public threats against U.S. citizens and interests in the Philippines. In January 2002, an American tourist was shot and killed by an unidentified gunman on the slopes of Mt. Pinatubo in Pampanga Province, an area known for NPA activity. Americans are warned to avoid hiking or camping in this area and are advised to exercise caution when traveling elsewhere in the Philippines due to armed clashes between the New People's Army and government troops in some areas. Americans are also advised to exercise special caution when traveling throughout the Philippines around the time of the national elections on May 10, as election-related violence has been widely reported in this and during previous elections, especially in areas where the NPA remains active.

Extortionists have kidnapped several Filipinos and foreigners, including three American children, in recent years. Kidnappers operating in Metro Manila and throughout the Philippines have snatched family members of prominent local business leaders and politicians for financial gain, to make a political statement, or as part of business, land, or personal disputes. In January 2004, an American businessman was abducted in the Makati commercial district of Metro Manila and was held captive for 21 days before he was rescued by Philippine law enforcement authorities.

The ASG continues to issue public threats against U.S. citizens and interests in the Philippines. The ASG has taken hostage large numbers of Filipinos, Americans and foreign tourists. Several were freed after substantial ransoms were paid, some escaped or were rescued by military action, and some were killed. In 2002, one American hostage was killed and another injured during a rescue operation after spending more than a year in captivity. Because the ASG has demonstrated its ability to travel long distances by boat to kidnap foreigners, such as the May 2001 kidnapping operation in Palawan, it is possible that other locations in the Philippines, such as beach resorts, could be attacked. Americans should particularly avoid beach resorts in areas where the ASG remains active.

Americans living in or visiting the Philippines are strongly encouraged to register with the Consular Section of the U.S. Embassy in the Philippines and to obtain updated information on travel and security within the Philippines. The U.S. Embassy is located at: 1201 Roxas Boulevard; Manila, Philippines tel. (63)(2) 528-6300. The Consular American Citizen Services (ACS) section's fax number is (63)(2) 522-3242 and the ACS web page is at <http://manila.usembassy.gov>.

U.S. citizens should also consult the Department of State's Consular Information Sheet for the Philippines and the Worldwide Caution Public Announcement, which are available at the Department of State's web site, <http://travel.state.gov>. Current information travel and security in the Philippines may be obtained from the Department of State at 1-888-407-4747, or from overseas at 1-317-472-232.