
US Embassy in Colombia Designated to Process Visas for Cubans

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The US State Department designated its embassy in Bogota, Colombia, to process the visas for residents in Cuba that want to emigrate to the United States, according to a press release by the embassy in this capital.

The measure was adopted after the inconveniences caused by the withdrawal of the majority of the officials from that country by the supposed 'health incidents', an action rejected by the Cuban government for considering it as hasty.

The communique read that they were currently determining when the interviews for Cuban applicants in Bogota would start being scheduled, and clarified that if the National Visa Center (NVC) had not yet scheduled the appointment of the interested party, it would do so to hold the interviews in the Colombian capital.

The text also reads that the NVC will send an e-mail or letter indicating the place, date and time of the interview to each applicant, his / her claimant and his / her legal representative, if applicable.

According to the text, if the request was sent to the embassy in Havana and the person has not yet been interviewed, or if the meeting has already occurred and only the response is missing, the applicant will receive 'forthcoming' additional instructions, without indicating the probable deadlines for this procedure.

The newspaper Tampa Bay Times also refers to the aforementioned State Department plan to issue visas for Cuban citizens, while the service is suspended on its embassy in Cuba.

According to an e-mail from the State Department, in response to a query from the newspaper, the US federal agency said that 'in the coming weeks, we will begin transferring current immigrant visa applications and scheduling immigrant visa interviews for Cuban nationals at the US embassy in Bogota, Colombia.'

'Cuban applicants for nonimmigrant visas may apply at any US embassy or consulate overseas, but must be

physically present in the country at the time of the application,' according to the statement.

'The only nonimmigrant visa applications at the US embassy in Havana will be able to process are those for diplomatic or official visas or extremely rare emergency cases in when the applicant has a life-threatening illness requiring treatment in the United States.'

'We understand this is a significant change and an inconvenience for visa applicants. The number of consular personnel in Cuba at this time, however, does not allow us to continue normal visa operations in Havana.'

The mail text also said the 'staff remaining in Havana will carry out core diplomatic and consular functions, including providing emergency assistance to US citizens in Cuba.'

On October 3, the State Department announced the expulsion of 15 Cuban officials from the Cuban embassy in Washington, a decision deemed irresponsible by the island authorities, after the federal agency reported on September 29 that it had withdrawn more than half of its staff in Havana, due to allegations of supposed health incidents that affected them.

In this regard, Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez explained on October 3 that the United States provided late, fractional and insufficient information about the alleged health damage to its diplomats here, taken as a pretext to expel Cuban embassy officials from Washington.

The US embassy in the Cuban capital only gave some information of interest on the supposed incidents after President Raul Castro personally reiterated to US Charge d'Affaires Jeffrey DeLaurentis the importance of sharing more information and cooperation between the competent authorities from both countries.

Previously, during a meeting with Secretary of State Rex Tillerson on September 26, Rodriguez called him not to politicize a case of this nature and not to take hasty decisions with groundless conclusive results of the investigation.
