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State Department Puts Mexico on 'Travel Warning' List Because of Danger to Americans There

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By Penny Starr, Senior Staff Writer

(CNSNews.com) – A U.S. State Department official said on Friday that the decision to upgrade Mexico from its Travel Alert list to the list of countries deemed dangerous enough for a Travel Warning status was not related to the death of two U.S. citizens on March 13 as they left a children's birthday party in the violence-ridden city of Ciudad Juarez.



Nolan Webster, right, shown here with his brother Ryan, was 22 when he drowned at a resort in Mexico. His mother, Maureen, said she wanted his death to be made public in State Department documents to prevent other tragedies from happening. (Photo courtesy of the Webster family)

The official told CNSNews.com it was a "coincidence" that the status change was announced on the Sunday following the killings and that the change was already ready for launch as early as March 8.

When asked why that decision was not made earlier given State Department databases that shows hundreds of U.S. citizens have been victims of homicides since 2002 – including 79 homicides and one execution in its **Death of U.S. Citizens Abroad by Non-natural Causes** for 2009 – the official cited a growing concern over increasing violence in Mexico, particularly in six cities along its northern border with the United States.

According to the State Department, countries are deemed worthy of a travel alert status when "short-term" conditions pose a risk to the security of U.S. citizens.

"Natural disasters, terrorist attacks, coups, anniversaries of terrorist events, election-related demonstrations or violence, and high-profile events such as international conferences or regional sports events are examples of conditions that might generate a Travel Alert," the Web site states.

A Travel Warning is issued, according to the State Department, to describe long-term, protracted conditions that make a country dangerous or unstable." Travel Warnings also are issued when the U.S. government is limited in protecting citizens because of closures or staff reductions at its consulates.

In Mexico's case, the change in status was in conjunction with "authorization" by the State Department for the families of consulate personnel to return to the United States.

During a press briefing on March 15, Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs P.J. Crowley, told reporters that the announcement about Mexico being upgraded to the Travel Warning Status had already been made before Lesley A. Enriquez, 35, and her husband, Arthur H. Redelfs, 34, were shot to death in their car as they traveled with their one-year-old child back to their home in El Paso, Texas.

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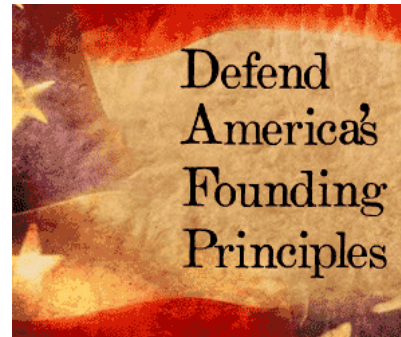
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Crowley also confirmed at the briefing that the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Obama administration is working “with Mexican authorities to bring the killers of American citizens Lesley Enriquez, who was an employee of our U.S. Consulate in Ciudad Juarez, and her husband Arthur Redelfs – the killers to justice.”



Brent Midlock was eight when he was sucked into piping at a pool at a Mexican resort. His mother, Nancy, also signed a waiver with State Department officials. State Department policy is to not release the names of any of the U.S. citizens who die abroad of non-natural causes. (Photo courtesy of the Midlock family)

In its report on the deaths of U.S. citizens abroad, no names are provided. The database only includes a date, location and general cause of death.

State Department officials cite privacy laws and “respect for the families” of the dead as the reasons that names and other details are not provided.

But Maureen Webster, whose 22-year-old son Nolan died in 2007 from what was said to be accidental drowning, and Nancy Midlock, whose eight-year-old son, Brent, died after being sucked into piping in a resort swimming pool in 2003, both signed State Department waivers, because they said they hoped publicity about what happened to their children would prevent other tragedies.

Webster told CNSNews.com that she repeatedly asked officials why Mexico was on the Travel Alert list and not the Travel Warning list but State Department officials did not directly answer her inquiries.

She said she spoke with someone at the Department of Citizens Services at the State Department last week after Mexico was added to the Travel Warning list and expressed frustration that it took the death of a federal worker to get the change made.

The official told Webster, however, that the decision was not related to the deaths of the U.S. consulate worker and her husband.

The State Department lists 30 countries on its Travel Warning list, including Mexico.

However, according to the Death of U.S. Citizens Abroad by Non-natural Causes for 2009, no Americans were murdered in 15 of those countries in 2009 – Eritrea, Central African Republic, Sudan, Somalia, Mauritania, Chad, Mali, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Algeria, Guinea, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Iran, Uzbekistan and Georgia.

In eight of the countries, a combined total of 32 U.S. Citizens were victims of homicide, including 11 in the Philippines, nine from “terrorist actions” in Afghanistan and 6 in Columbia.

Although many more U.S. citizens travel to Mexico than some of the other countries on the warning list, the number of Americans who are victims of homicide in Mexico is more than double of the combined total of 32 for eight countries on the list.

CNSNews.com has requested the names of U.S. citizens who have died in Mexico in recent years through the Freedom of Information Act. To date, almost two years after the FOIA was filed with the State Department, the request has not been answered.



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mhichil72 (6 days ago)

Why all the outrage? The odds of being killed in an inner-city of many U.S. cities is far greater than your odds of being killed in Mexico. @EON, Are you suggesting we now attack Mexico because diplomats were killed by criminals in that country? It's not like they were killed by an element within the foreign gov't but by a common enemy of both the U.S. and Mexican government.

eon (6 days ago)

What seems to have escaped everyone's notice in this is that the two people murdered were, respectively, a consular official and the spouse of same. And the U.S. government's reaction? Essentially, saying "so what?" For centuries, the murder of an official diplomatic representative, even a minor one, has been a "line in the sand" that nobody ever crosses, because if diplomats are not safe in a foreign country, there can be no guarantee of a way to negotiate in times of trouble. The fact that Obama & Hillary don't seem to care that a consular official was murdered is a signal to our enemies that they can do as they please and there will be no price to pay. That's bad enough, but when you consider Obama's obsession with "talking" and "reset buttons", it's just bizarre. He's literally saying "go ahead, kill our diplomats- we'll still give you what you want". We must now consider the possibility that we have idiots in charge at both State and the White House. clear ether eon

rollzone (8 days ago)

hello. noted the pictures are not of the two students killed. my condolences to all. the thought of saving money on education has risk, and even with the odds stacked in your favor, it is something to be carefully considered.

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