

MAXINE WATERS
MEMBER OF CONGRESS
43RD DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

COMMITTEE:
FINANCIAL SERVICES
CHAIRWOMAN

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0535

PLEASE REPLY TO:
WASHINGTON DC OFFICE
2221 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-0535
PHONE: (202) 225-2201
FAX: (202) 225-7854

DISTRICT OFFICE:
LOS ANGELES OFFICE
10124 SOUTH BROADWAY
SUITE 1
LOS ANGELES, CA 90003
PHONE: (323) 757-8900
FAX: (323) 757-9506

March 20, 2020

Dear Colleague:

I write with an update regarding our constituents who have been stranded abroad due to countries shutting down their borders in response to COVID-19.

As the COVID-19 panic spread worldwide, Americans abroad in several countries found themselves trapped and stranded, without clear direction or support from the Trump administration. As countries began closing their borders, I received communications from my constituents who informed me that they were stranded in Morocco. Once I learned about their plight, I immediately contacted the State Department, only to confirm what my constituents had alleged: that the State Department was not properly communicating with Americans seeking to return to their home country, in stark contrast to other nations, which had effectively implemented operations to repatriate their citizens home. In response, I sent the attached letter to the State Department, expressing frustration with the failure of our officials to provide assistance and safe passage home to Americans stranded abroad.

Finally, after failing to communicate properly with the Americans who had been abandoned by our government in Morocco and with no substantive operations plan to repatriate our constituents, the Department responded to my letter on the 19th, confirming that chartered flights would be available for those still unable to return to the United States. For any member with constituents stranded in Morocco: please advise them to contact MoroccoEvac@state.gov, and notify them that they should be prepared to depart from Marrakech International Airport. The flights are being serviced by British Airways, a partner of American Airlines, and will connect to one of ten domestic destinations by way of London. While this situation was not resolved as expeditiously or efficiently as our constituents deserved, I am pleased to know that the Department has responded to my letter and taken substantive action to bring them home. I want to also commend American Airlines for working with the State Department to develop a plan to ensure all Americans stranded in Morocco are afforded the opportunity to return home.

I understand that there are more Americans stranded abroad in other countries, including Peru and Guatemala, in addition to the approximately 3,000 Americans who were stranded in Morocco at the time my constituent contacted me for assistance. Since we know that many of our constituents may be experiencing similar challenges in other countries, we must continue to work together with the State Department to ensure that all Americans who want to return to the US are afforded the opportunity to do so safely.

Sincerely,



Maxine Waters
Member of Congress

From: Kennedy, Wendy [State Department]
Sent: Thursday, March 19, 2020 8:16 PM
To:
Subject: Morocco update

US citizens in Morocco should have received the below e-mail. If they are interested in the flight, they should contact our embassy as directed below.

From: MoroccoEvac@state.gov
Date: March 19, 2020 at 7:19:05 PM EDT
Subject: Message for U.S. Citizens: Special Flights Leaving Marrakech on Friday to the United States
Reply-To: <MoroccoEvac@state.gov>

The Department of State and the U.S. Mission to [Morocco](#) have arranged special chartered flights for U.S. citizens and U.S. Lawful Permanent Residents departing Marrakech International Airport [on Friday, March 20, 2020, beginning at 11:30 am](#). These flights will include a Marrakech to London Heathrow leg and an onward connecting flight to one of 10 cities in the USA served by British Airways. The \$1485 cost of these one-way tickets will include the flight to London AND to one of the 10 U.S. destinations below:

Miami (MIA), Los Angeles (LAX), Newark (EWR), Boston (BOS), Washington, DC Dulles (IAD), Chicago (ORD), New York City (JFK), Seattle (SEA), San Francisco (SFO), and Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW)

All passengers will need to reimburse the U.S. Government for the flight, and a promissory note for approximately \$1485 which must be signed before boarding. No cash or credit card payments will be accepted. You will be responsible for any arrangements or costs (lodging, onward destination or local transportation, etc.) beyond your initial destination in the USA. Exact departure time and routing are subject to change.

If you want to depart on one of these flights, please email the information below to MoroccoEvac@state.gov. The flights will be filled in the order that the emails are received. Please do not call the Consulate to confirm receipt of your email; we will contact you if you are confirmed for a seat on one of these flights. In the event these flights are full and there is still demand, we will make every effort to arrange additional flights for Saturday.

In your email please provide the following:

- Full name
- Passport number
- Citizenship (only for Legal Permanent Residents of the U.S.)
- Date of birth
- Gender
- Email address
- Phone number
- Earliest time you can arrive in Marrakech [on March 20, 2020](#)
- Desired onward destination in the United States (these tickets only include one of the seven destinations below: Miami (MIA), Los Angeles (LAX), Newark (EWR), Boston (BOS), Washington, DC Dulles (IAD), Chicago (ORD), New York City (JFK), Seattle (SEA), San Francisco (SFO), and Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW))

Unless you receive an email from the U.S. Mission to [Morocco](#) confirming your flight, please do not come to the airport in Marrakech. Only those with email confirmations will be permitted to fly tomorrow.

From: "Boda, Suzanne" [American Airlines]

Date: March 20, 2020 at 10:28:53 AM EDT

To: "Samuel, Twaun" <Twaun.Samuel@mail.house.gov>

Subject: Morocco update

Good Morning, Twaun. I hope this finds you, the Congresswoman and your team members well.

To close the loop on the people in Morocco, in coordination with the State Department, we have worked with our joint business partner, British Airways, to fly a number of missions into Morocco to pick up UK and US citizens. They are being transported to London Heathrow, and then on to the United States on either American Airlines flights, or flights on a carrier of their choice.

Thank you for bringing this to our attention and we're glad to be able to assist in the repatriation of these people.

Many thanks. Stay healthy!

Best, Suzanne

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March 18, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

As the country responds to the nationwide, and global, impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, I grow increasingly concerned that the State Department's response to United States citizens stranded abroad has failed to safeguard their wellbeing and protect their interests.

On Sunday, March 15, the Moroccan government announced that it would suspend all international flights as part of its effort to stymie the spread of COVID-19. This announcement left an estimated 3,000 Americans stranded in Morocco, without resources, answers, or support.¹ Included among those stranded is a constituent of California's 43rd District. These Americans require immediate assistance returning home, which is especially true for those with pre-existing health conditions, who are in danger of running out of their medications and face the prospect of having no access to health care in a foreign country during a global health crisis. The State Department and the United States embassy in Morocco must take whatever actions are necessary and appropriate to enable these stranded Americans to come home immediately.

Constituents have notified their Members of Congress that they are desperate for assistance, having received little to no guidance from embassy officials or other federal government representatives. Stranded Americans have been told to sign up for the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program, which has done little more than send notifications that the Moroccan government has halted all flights in and out of the country, information of which they are clearly already aware. On March 17, travelers were notified by the U.S. embassy in Morocco that commercial flights were available out of the country, and to "contact the airlines immediately" and if travelers were unable to secure a booking, to "present yourself to the airline operator counter."²

¹ <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2020-03-18/coronavirus-caught-these-u-s-travelers-in-morocco-theyre-trying-to-get-home>

² <https://twitter.com/USEmbMorocco/status/1239949907852759040>

Following these instructions, constituents notified their Members of Congress that they could not get in touch with the airlines over the phone, that the airlines' mobile apps and websites had no information about outbound Moroccan flights, and that the airports were devoid of any staff for them to present themselves to, making it impossible to follow the embassy instructions. The embassy, upon being notified that constituents were unable to follow its instructions, simply told stranded Americans to keep trying. Furthermore, Members were notified by constituents that frustrated airport crowds have been growing riotous, and as such, the airports themselves posed a threat to their physical safety. On March 17, the Moroccan government announced that outbound commercial flights may not be allowed after March 19, causing more distress and panic for stranded Americans who have received no support from their government.³

This lack of guidance and support has not only left Americans stranded in Morocco, it has subjected them to unnecessary distress, panic, and trauma. When the State Department's actions, or lack thereof, are juxtaposed with those of other countries assisting citizens stranded in Morocco, it is apparent that the Department has wholly failed to protect Americans in the region.

The United Kingdom, Germany, France, Croatia,⁴ Austria,⁵ and Spain have successfully repatriated citizens from the region.⁶ Germany has gone further, orchestrating a plan to bring 100,000 German citizens home as more countries follow Morocco's example and close borders. Reports indicate that these countries "maintained a steady stream of updates on social media," including the British embassy, which "set up a 24-hour crisis center to ferry its nationals home." In contrast, U.S. authorities have "done little more than direct citizens to book seats on those rescue flights..."⁷

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a host of conflicts and chaos with which all United States governments—local, state, and federal—have been forced to rapidly reckon, and I recognize that the task before us is not easy. I further acknowledge that thousands of State Department employees are working tirelessly to address each and every one of these conflicts under the Department's purview. These efforts, however, do not excuse lapses in judgment, especially when such lapses implicate the safety of my constituents and Americans nationwide. The situation in Morocco was not handled by the State Department with any semblance of expediency or efficiency, and I have serious concerns that these subpar results will only repeat in countries which follow Morocco and close their borders. The Americans stranded in Morocco must be allowed to come home immediately.

Therefore, I request that you immediately provide the following information, both to Congress as well as the general public:

³ <https://twitter.com/MOROCCOinUK/status/1239997424283848704>

⁴ <https://www.total-croatia-news.com/lifestyle/42205-morocco>

⁵ <https://www.total-croatia-news.com/lifestyle/42205-morocco>

⁶ <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2020-03-18/coronavirus-caught-these-u-s-travelers-in-morocco-theyre-trying-to-get-home>

⁷ <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2020-03-18/coronavirus-caught-these-u-s-travelers-in-morocco-theyre-trying-to-get-home>

1. An immediate explanation as to how and when the State Department, as well as United States Ambassador to Morocco David T. Fischer, will implement its plan to repatriate stranded Americans in Morocco, including but not limited to State Department chartered flights leaving the region;
2. Guidance as to when the United States embassy in Morocco and the State Department will establish an emergency hotline that offers citizens stranded in Morocco, including those who have already signed up for the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program, assistance and information;
3. Immediate recommendations and guidance as to how stranded Americans can best protect their health and safety while awaiting transport out of Morocco;
4. A detailed briefing on the Department's operation plans for any Americans stranded, in any country, due to COVID-19 related issues, which shall include how the operations in Morocco failed stranded Americans and what will be done to ensure such failings do not repeat in subsequent countries.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Maxine Waters". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Maxine" and last name "Waters" clearly distinguishable.

Maxine Waters
Member of Congress