Seoul Consensus Statement on Consular Cooperation

October 27, 2016

We, consular officials from the foreign ministries of 32 countries and the European External Action Service[1], met in Seoul, Republic of Korea, for the third senior consular officials' meeting of the Global Consular Forum (the Forum). This Statement reflects our shared vision for the Forum and reflects our common desire to cooperate to improve the delivery of consular services to our nationals.

1. Our respective governments have a long-held and proud tradition of providing consular services to citizens. Globalization and technical advances have increased the numbers of international travellers, and more people reside outside their countries of nationality. At the same time, we observe that citizens have increasingly high expectations of the nature, extent and coverage of consular services. As consular officials, we are managing larger and more complex consular caseloads, often with constrained resources. It is in this context that Members meet to work together to respond to these challenges.

2. We share a belief that the Forum should operate flexibly to promote opportunities for cooperation on consular matters. This is accomplished by providing a platform for the sharing of best practice in consular services and crisis response, and the promotion of high standards of service in the assistance of our citizens travelling or living abroad.

3. We welcome the progress and achievements made in the first and second Forum meetings, in which we affirmed the importance of international collaboration and cooperation on consular issues of mutual interest. To address existing and emerging consular challenges and priorities, we will continue to work through the Forum and other relevant bodies to further deepen our consular cooperation and collaboration.

[1] Pursuant to EU treaties, the exercise of consular protection is a prerogative of the EU Member States. EU institutions and services facilitate coordination and cooperation among EU Member States in regard to such protection.

4. We note that the membership in the Forum deliberately reflects a diversity of cultures, political and legal systems, and size of consular service. As Members of the Forum, we aim to coordinate where possible and appropriate in responding to overseas crises and major international events. We also aim to share experience in policy making, best practices and lessons learned, as well as to help small and developing consular authorities where feasible. The Forum continues to provide a platform for this interaction, including digitally through social media and the website.

5. We note that 2017 will mark the 50th anniversary of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations coming into force in 1967. The Convention enables and facilitates the delivery of consular services. Meetings of the Forum provide an opportunity to discuss the past and future benefits and challenges in the practical implementation of the Convention.

6. In our ongoing activities, we have examined existing consular agreements, including the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, and shared our various practices to provide ideas, guidance and advice on how we can develop our respective consular practices and procedures to provide high quality consular services to our citizens. This sharing is intended to be a living resource for the Forum and we aim to build upon it at future meetings. All interested Members are encouraged to participate in these efforts.

7. As consular officials, we often fulfill our role with support, assistance and expertise from other ministries and government agencies in areas such as justice, social services, defense, security, anti-terrorism, international organizations and, for some Members, with non-governmental organizations and the private sector. We acknowledge with appreciation the participation and assistance of all partners who have been instrumental in improving the quality of life and safety of people travelling or living abroad.

8. Outreach to and engagement with stakeholders can be an important option to explore ways in which we can work together to respond effectively to modern day consular challenges and ensure our citizens are safer when travelling. In acknowledging their contribution, we also encourage, where possible and appropriate, the forging of public-private partnerships to address consular challenges and improve the services provided to our citizens abroad.

We are committed, where possible and appropriate, to continue consular cooperation in the following key areas:

9. Promoting a safe travel culture

    a. Given the importance of safety for our travelling citizens, to better understand travellers by analyzing patterns of international travel and how they respond to various methods of communication before implementing public messaging services.

    b. Work together closely with the private sector, especially with tourism, transportation, insurance, media and information technology industries, to create targeted, evergreen, innovative and user-friendly advice and information for a wide range of audiences and demographic groups to promote safe travel practices.

10. Providing consular services to migrant and foreign workers

    a. Strengthen our efforts to facilitate the effective delivery of consular services to migrant and foreign workers, with a view to promoting their active participation in host communities and empowering them by various means.

11. Improving joint response to crises and disasters

    a. In response to the growing demands on our consular response to large-scale crises and natural disasters such as earthquakes, intensify cooperation and coordination on crisis management in areas such as information sharing and exchanging best practices, and explore new areas of cooperation.

    b. Taking into account the impact of deadly terrorist attacks around the globe, cooperate in cases of severe incidents.

    c. Consider expanding our partnerships with non-governmental stakeholders and our collaboration with existing international organizations and other stakeholders to help improve our coordination and the efficiency of our response in a crisis, possibly by holding consular-themed meetings.

d. Draw on academic research and the United Kingdom–Netherlands report on the effectiveness of social media in crises in establishing new partnerships with media and telecommunications opinion-makers and service providers, and actively use social media to provide our citizens with the information they need, particularly in times of crisis.

12. Improving consular services to vulnerable clients

a. To better understand the particular challenges around providing consular service in relation to cases of mental illness, continue our discussions around the scope of the consular officer role, including on issues related to the release of private information and the safety of consular officers.

b. To effectively deal with cases of cross-border child abduction, cooperate to increase awareness and understanding of international mechanisms to resolve cases.

13. Improving support for further forum meetings

a. We express our thanks to Canada for having agreed to host and support the Secretariat since its inception.

b. To support Members' modernization efforts of consular services delivered by small, developing or least-developed consular authorities, we offer to share with them, where possible, our consular tools, training programs, communications material and best practices and to encourage their efforts to develop structures, programs and materials suited to their needs.

c. We ask the Steering Committee to consider how support will be provided to further meetings of the Forum which provides a valuable venue in addition to existing networks.

d. In this context, we welcome the proposal of the Republic of Korea to establish an e-secretariat before the fourth Global Consular Forum (GCF IV) meeting and their offer to operate and maintain this new platform.

e. We invite Members to consider how to build on these efforts, either through electronic means or in person, and at GCF IV, to be held in approximately 18 months.