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Press Release

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New Developments in the United States Visa Waiver Program

The United States government is pleased to welcome seven additional countries to the visa waiver program. These countries are the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, the Republic of Korea and the Slovak Republic. Starting November 17, 2008, travelers who hold biometric passports from these countries and who register on-line through the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) will be able to travel to the United States for business or tourist trips of 90 days or less without obtaining a visa from a United States consulate.

Beginning January 12, 2009, on-line registration with ESTA will also become mandatory for passport holders from the 27 previously-eligible countries, including France, who travel on the visa-waiver program. Individuals who are currently planning to travel to the United States or anticipate future travel in 2009 or 2010 are strongly encouraged to register now with ESTA. The benefits of applying now are significant: travelers will know with certainty that they can finalize travel plans and depart without encountering difficulties upon arrival in the United States. Once completed, a single ESTA registration is valid for a period of two years, or until a traveler's passport expires, whichever comes first. ESTA applications may be submitted at any time prior to travel to the United States, but visa waiver program travelers are encouraged to apply for authorization as soon as they begin to plan a trip to the United States.

Travelers can register with ESTA on-line at <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov>

ESTA is a no-fee, fully-automated electronic version of paper documents currently completed by travelers before arriving in the United States, and is available in 16 languages, including French. ESTA registration allows improved services to those individuals who under the current system would only learn of their ineligibility to enter the United States under the visa waiver program upon their arrival at a U.S. port of entry.

Nationals of the seven newly-added visa waiver countries are advised to consult the U.S. Embassy website in their country of citizenship for country-specific information. More information on ESTA for French travelers can be obtained by visiting the website of the Embassy of the United States in France at <http://french.france.usembassy.gov/esta.html>.