



Homeland
Security

July 12, 2023

The Honorable J. Luis Correa
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Correa:

Thank you for your June 6, 2023, letter to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) regarding your concerns about Chile's status in the Visa Waiver Program (VWP). I am responding on behalf of the Department.

Although the VWP facilitates lawful travel, it is first and foremost a security partnership. Program countries must meet and maintain compliance with requirements related to counterterrorism, law enforcement, immigration enforcement, travel and identity document security, and border management. The VWP is also a powerful engagement tool. The U.S. government regularly leverages participation in the VWP to work with program countries to strengthen our security partnerships and ensure they continue to meet all program requirements.

DHS remains deeply concerned about the ongoing phenomenon of South Americans traveling to the United States through various lawful pathways to participate in criminal activity, commonly known as South American Theft Groups (SATG). To counter the threat from SATG actors, DHS, in partnership with the Department of State (DOS), is focusing on three areas: engagement, operations, and information sharing.

DHS, DOS, and interagency partners are actively engaged with all levels of the Government of Chile to address and counter SATG activity. Senior DHS and DOS officials have communicated the urgency of the situation to their Chilean counterparts and made it clear that immediate measures are required to increase law enforcement cooperation and information sharing to better counter the SATG threat. Chile has expressed its commitment to actively engage with U.S. law enforcement and security officials to expeditiously address any gaps that may facilitate travel of SATG actors.

In support of these efforts, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) deployed officers to engage directly with Chilean law enforcement authorities in May 2023 to share and implement current best practices in traveler screening, information sharing, and criminal network analysis. Following the deployment, DHS communicated additional recommendations for the Government of Chile to further improve its traveler screening capabilities and processes. DHS expects that

the Government of Chile will work toward expeditious implementation of these recommended improvements.

Finally, as with all VWP partners, DHS requires that the Government of Chile implement an Enhanced Border Security Partnership for information sharing. Once fully implemented, this partnership will enable DHS to routinely screen the biometrics or other unique identifiers of travelers against Chile's criminal history records to support routine border and immigration vetting. This enhanced information sharing, when implemented, will enable DHS to directly query Chilean criminal history data for better identification of known or suspected criminals to ensure they do not travel to the United States under the VWP. The information shared would also be available to DOS's consular officers when reviewing visa applications from Chilean nationals seeking to travel to the United States.

To finalize discussions on the scope of the information sharing and to prepare for implementation, DHS officials met with a high-level interagency delegation from Chile on June 21, 2023. DHS will continue to engage the Government of Chile as a priority matter to achieve full implementation of this enhanced information sharing capability as quickly as possible to expeditiously address the SATG threat.

Thank you again for your letter. Should you have any additional questions, please contact the DHS Office of Legislative Affairs at (202) 447-5890.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Z. Buetow', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Zephranie Buetow
Assistant Secretary for Legislative Affairs