

E.R

Wednesday, 1 April 2009

HOME OFFICE

VISA WAIVER TEST – INTRODUCTION OF VISA REGIMES

The Minister of State for Borders and Immigration (Phil Woolas):

The Government is today announcing the dates of implementation of the visa regimes, announced in my right honourable friend the Home Secretary's written statement to the House of 9th February 2009 (Official Report, Column 51WS). These tough new visa requirements will further strengthen the UK Border, whilst ensuring the UK continues to welcome genuine visitors.

Visa regimes for Bolivian and Venezuelan nationals will begin on Monday 18th May 2009. Venezuelan nationals holding valid biometric, machine readable passports will be exempt from the visa requirement. At the same time we will clarify how the visa exemption for Taiwan passport holders works - that it only applies to those with full Taiwan passports.

The temporary visa exemption for South African visitors with a previous travel history to the UK which began on 3 March will cease at midnight on 30 June 2009. From Wednesday 1 July 2009 all South African visitors to the UK will require a visa, as will visitors from Lesotho and Swaziland.

The new visa requirements mean that nationals from these countries wishing to visit the UK for up to six months will need to obtain a visit visa, and provide their fingerprints, before they travel. Nationals of these countries seeking to travel via the UK *en route* to another country will also need a transit visa. This is in addition to the existing requirement for a visa in order to live, work, study or marry in the UK.

All the new regimes will be implemented in line with the high standard of the UK's current visa operations.