

## Arrest or Detention of Foreign Nationals

### 422.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

Article 36 of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, sets forth certain rights of foreign nationals from member countries when arrested, detained or imprisoned by law enforcement officials in this country. This section provides direction to officers when considering a physical arrest or detention of a foreign national. All foreign service personnel shall be treated with respect and courtesy, regardless of the level of established immunity. As noted herein, the United States is a party to several bilateral agreements that obligate our authorities to notify the consulate upon the person's detention, regardless of whether the detained person(s) request that his/her consulate be notified. The list of specific countries that the United States is obligated to notify is listed in the U.S. Department of State [website](#).

#### 422.1.1 DEFINITIONS

**Foreign National** - Anyone who is not a citizen of the United States (U.S.). A person with dual-citizenship, U.S. and foreign, is not a foreign national.

**Immunity** - Refers to various protections and privileges extended to the employees of foreign governments who are present in the U.S. as official representatives of their home governments. These privileges are embodied in international law and are intended to ensure the efficient and effective performance of their official "missions" (i.e., embassies, consulates, etc.) in foreign countries. Proper respect for the immunity to which an individual is entitled is necessary to ensure that U.S. diplomatic relations are not jeopardized and to maintain reciprocal treatment of U.S. personnel abroad. Although immunity may preclude U.S. courts from exercising jurisdiction, it is not intended to excuse unlawful activity. It is the policy of the U.S. Department of State's Office of Foreign Missions (OFM) that illegal acts by Foreign Service personnel should always be pursued through proper channels. Additionally, the host country's right to protect its citizens supersedes immunity privileges. Peace officers may intervene to the extent necessary to prevent the endangerment of public safety or the commission of a serious crime, regardless of immunity claims.

### 422.2 ARREST OR DETENTION OF FOREIGN NATIONALS

Officers should take appropriate enforcement action for all violations observed, regardless of claims of diplomatic or consular immunity received from violators. A person shall not, however, be subjected to in-custody arrest when diplomatic or consular immunity is claimed by the individual or suspected by the officer, and the officer has verified or reasonably suspects that the claim of immunity is valid.

### 422.3 LEVELS OF IMMUNITY

The specific degree of immunity afforded to foreign service personnel within the U.S. is directly related to their function and position in this country.

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### 422.3.1 DIPLOMATIC AGENTS

Diplomatic agents (e.g., ambassadors and United Nations representatives) are afforded the highest levels of immunity. They are exempt from arrest or detention and are immune from all criminal (and most civil) prosecution by the host state. The family members of diplomatic agents enjoy these same immunities. Currently there are no diplomatic agents permanently assigned to Washington; but they do occasionally visit the state.

### 422.3.2 CONSULAR OFFICERS

Consular officers are the ranking members of consular posts who perform various formal functions on behalf of their own governments. Typical titles include consul general, consul, and vice consul. These officials are immune from arrest or detention, except pursuant to a felony warrant. They are only immune from criminal and civil prosecution arising from official acts. Official acts immunity must be raised as an affirmative defense in the court jurisdiction, and its validity is determined by the court. Under this defense, the prohibited act itself must have been performed as an official function. It is not sufficient that the consular agent was on-duty or in an official capacity at the time of the violation. The family members of consular officers generally enjoy no immunity, however, any family member who enjoys a higher level of immunity is issued an identification card by Department of State (DOS) enumerating any privileges or immunities on the back of the card. Examples are consular officers and family members from Russia or China.

There are approximately 40 consular officers in Washington, with most located in Seattle and Spokane.

### 422.3.3 HONORARY CONSULS

Honorary consuls are part-time employees of the country they represent and are either permanent residents of the U.S. or U.S. nationals (unlike career consular officers, who are foreign nationals on temporary assignment to the U.S.). Honorary consuls may be arrested and detained; limited immunity for official acts may be available as a subsequent defense. Family members have no immunity.

## **422.4 IDENTIFICATION**

All diplomatic and consular personnel who are entitled to immunity are registered with the Department of State and are issued distinctive identification cards by the Department of State Protocol Office. These cards are the best means of identifying Foreign Service personnel. They include a photograph, identifying information, and, on the reverse side, a brief description of the bearer's immunity status. Unfortunately, these identification cards are not always promptly issued by the Department of State. In addition to the Department of State identification card, Foreign Service personnel should also have a driver license issued by the Department of State Diplomatic Motor Vehicle Office (DMVO), which in most circumstances replaces the operator's license issued by the state.

### 422.4.1 VEHICLE REGISTRATION

Vehicles that are owned by foreign missions or Foreign Service personnel and their dependents are registered with the Department of State OFM and display distinctive red, white, and blue

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license plates. Vehicles assigned to diplomatic or consular officers will generally have license plates labels with the words "Diplomat" or "Consul." Vehicles owned by honorary consuls are not issued OFM license plates; but may have Washington license plates with an "honorary consul" label. Driver's identity or immunity status should not be presumed from the type of license plates displayed on the vehicle. The status of an OFM license plate should be run via the National Law Enforcement Telecommunications System (NLETS), designating "US" as the state, if the officer has reason to question the legitimate possession of the license plate.

The State of Washington may also issue honorary consul or official representative of any foreign government who is a citizen or resident of the United States of America, duly licensed and holding an exequatur issued by the Department of State of the United States of America special plates of a distinguishing color and numerical series.

### **422.5 ENFORCEMENT PROCEDURES**

The following procedures provide a guideline for handling enforcement of foreign nationals:

#### **422.5.1 CITABLE OFFENSES**

An enforcement document shall be issued at the scene for all violations warranting such action, regardless of the violator's immunity status. The issuance of a citation is not considered an arrest or detention under current Department of State guidelines. Whenever the equivalent of a notice to appear is issued to an immunity claimant, the following additional procedures shall be followed by the arresting officer:

- A. Identification documents are to be requested of the claimant.
- B. The title and country represented by the claimant are to be recorded on the back of the officer's copy of the Notice to Appear for later reference. Do not include on the face of the notice to appear.
- C. The identity and immunity status of the individual shall be conclusively established.
- D. Verified diplomatic agents and consular officers, including staff and family members from countries with which the U.S. has special agreements, are not required to sign the Notice to Appear. The word "Refused" shall be entered in the signature box, and the violator shall be released.
- E. Verified consular staff members, excluding those from countries with which the U.S. has special agreements, are generally obligated to sign the Notice to Appear, but a signature shall not be required if their immunity status is uncertain.
- F. All other claimants are subject to the provisions of the policy and procedures outlined in this chapter.
- G. The violator shall be provided with the appropriate copy of the notice to appear.

#### **422.5.2 IN-CUSTODY ARRESTS**

Diplomatic agents and consular officers are immune from arrest or detention (unless they have no identification and the detention is to verify their diplomatic status). Proper identification of immunity claimants is imperative in potential in-custody situations. Claimants who are not entitled

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to immunity shall be placed in custody in accordance with the provisions outlined in Policy Manual § 422.7.

A subject who is placed under arrest and claims diplomatic or consular immunity shall not be physically restrained before verification of the claim (unless restraint is necessary for the protection of the officer or others.)

A supervisor shall be promptly notified and should respond to the scene when possible.

Field verification of the claimant's identity is to be attempted as follows:

- A. Identification cards issued by the Department of State, Protocol Office, are the only valid evidence of diplomatic or consular immunity. The following types of identification cards are issued: Diplomatic (blue bordered), Consular (red bordered), and Official (green bordered), The Department of State identification cards are 3-3/4 inch by 1-1/2 inch and contain a photograph of the bearer.
- B. Initiate telephone verification with the Department of State. Newly arrived members of diplomatic or consular missions may not yet have official Department of State identity documents. Verify immunity by telephone with the Department of State any time an individual claims immunity and cannot present satisfactory identification, the officer has reason to doubt the claim of immunity, or there is a possibility of physical arrest. Law enforcement personnel should use the following numbers in order of preference:

Office of Foreign Missions	Diplomatic Security Service
San Francisco, CA	915 Second Avenue, Room 3410
(415) 744-2910, Ext. 22 or 23	Seattle, WA 98174
(415) 744-2913 FAX	(206) 220-7721(206) 220-7723
(0800-1700 PST)	FAX
Office of Foreign Missions	Department of State
Diplomatic Motor Vehicle Office	Diplomatic Security Service
Washington D.C.	Command Center
(202) 895-3521 (Driver License Verification) or	Washington D.C.
(202) 895-3532 (Registration Verification)	(202) 647-7277
(202) 895-3533 FAX	(202) 647-1512
(0815-1700 EST)	(Available 24 hours)
	(202) 647-0122 FAX

Members of diplomatic or consular missions also may have other forms of identification. These include identification cards issued by Office of Emergency Services, local law enforcement

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agencies, the foreign embassy, or consulate; driver licenses issued by Department of State; and, Department of State license indicia on the vehicle. All these items are only an indication that the bearer may have some form of immunity.

Subjects verified through the above procedures as being officials entitled to immunity (diplomatic agent, consular officers and consular staff and family members from countries with which the U.S. has special agreements) may not be arrested. The procedures below shall be followed. These procedures should also be used in the event immunity cannot be verified, but another form of identification indicates that immunity is probable.

If the release of the violator will not create an additional hazard, adequate information to properly identify the violator shall be obtained then the official shall be released. A supervisor's approval for the release shall be obtained whenever possible. The necessary release documents and/or a Certificate of Release form should only be issued under the proper conditions.

If the violator appears to have been driving while under the influence, field sobriety tests, including Preliminary Alcohol Screening (PAS) device tests and chemical tests should be offered and obtained whenever possible, however, these tests cannot be compelled. The subject shall not be permitted to drive. A supervisor's approval for release shall be obtained whenever possible and alternative transportation should be arranged.

All facts of the incident shall be documented in accordance with this policy in a Driving Under the Influence (DUI) Arrest-Investigation Report, Arrest-Investigation Report and/or any other relevant Report form. Notwithstanding the field release of the subject, prosecution is still appropriate and should be pursued by the command concerned. The Department of State will take appropriate sanctions against errant foreign service personnel, even where prosecution is not undertaken by the agency.

### **422.6 TRAFFIC COLLISIONS**

Persons involved in traffic collisions who possess a Department of State OFM Diplomatic Driver License, issued by the DMVO, shall have the collision report coded as required. If subsequent prosecution of the claimant is anticipated, the claimant's title, country, and type of identification presented should be recorded for future reference. Issuance of a citation to, or arrest of, an immunity claimant at the accident scene should be handled in accordance with the procedures specified in Policy Manual § 422.5 of this chapter.

#### **422.6.1 VEHICLES**

Vehicles, which are owned by subjects with full immunity, may not be searched, stored, or impounded without the owner's permission. (Such permission may be assumed if the vehicle has been stolen.) These vehicles may, however, be towed the necessary distance to remove them from obstructing traffic or creating any other hazard.

#### **422.6.2 REPORTS**

A photocopy of each traffic collision report involving an identified diplomat and/or immunity claimant shall be forwarded to the office of the Chief of Police within 48 hours whether or not the

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claim is verified. The words "Immunity Claim" shall be marked on the photocopy, together with a notation of the claimant's title, country, and type of identification presented (if applicable). In addition to the report, a follow-up cover memorandum should be submitted if the violation was flagrant, if the claimant was uncooperative, or if there were any other unusual aspects of the enforcement contact that should be reported to the Department of State for further action. The Shift Commander/Supervisor apprised of the incident/accident shall also send a copy of all documents and reports submitted by the investigating officer along with any supervisor's notes, materials and/or logs to the Chief of Police's office within 48 hours of the incident. The Chief of Police's office will check to ensure that notification of Department of State and all necessary follow-up occur.

### **422.7 FOREIGN NATIONALS WHO DO NOT CLAIM IMMUNITY**

These policies and procedures apply to foreign nationals who do not claim diplomatic or consular immunity.

Officers shall arrest foreign nationals only under the following circumstances:

- A. There is a valid judicial warrant issued for the person's arrest.
- B. There is probable cause to believe that the foreign national has violated a federal criminal law, a state law, or a local ordinance.

Officers are committed to providing service and enforcing laws in a fair and equitable manner. Officers do not rely solely on race, ethnicity, national origin or immigration status as a basis for probable cause or reasonable suspicion or as a motivating factor in making law enforcement decisions.

Officers shall not contact, question, delay, detain or arrest an individual because s/he is suspected of violating immigration laws.

Requesting adequate identification as part of a criminal investigation is necessary and appropriate. However, officers should not:

Request specific documents relating to someone's immigration status such as a passport, alien registration card, or "green card," unless the officers are conducting a criminal investigation where the civil immigration status is relevant to the crime under investigation. When a person fails to produce a driver's license or identity card upon request as required by state law, it is not a violation of this policy for an officer to inquire whether the person has any other form of identification, such as a passport.

Officers shall not use stops for minor offenses, the provision of assistance during traffic accidents, or requests for voluntary information as a pretext for discovering a person's immigration status.

International treaty obligations provide for notification of foreign governments when foreign nationals are arrested or otherwise detained in the U.S.

Whenever an officer arrests and incarcerates a foreign national or detains a foreign national for investigation for over two hours, the officer shall promptly advise the individual that he/she is

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entitled to have his/her government notified of the arrest or detention. If the individual wants his/her government notified, the officer shall begin the notification process.

#### 422.7.1 ARREST PROCEDURE

This procedure applies to detentions of more than two hours. Whenever an officer physically arrests or detains an individual for criminal investigation and the officer reasonably believes the person to be a foreign national, the officer shall inquire to determine the person's citizenship.

If the individual claims citizenship of one of the countries for which notification of the consulate/embassy is mandatory, officers shall provide Combined Communications Center with the information below as soon as practicable, regardless of whether the individual desires that the embassy/consulate be notified. This procedure is critical because of treaty obligations with the particular countries. The list of countries and jurisdictions that require notification can be found on the U.S. Department of State website.

Officers shall provide Combined Communications Center with the following information concerning the individual:

- Country of citizenship.
- Full name of individual, including paternal and maternal surname if used.
- Date of birth or age.
- Current residence.
- Time, date, place, location of incarceration/detention, and the 24-hour telephone number of the place of detention if different from the Department itself.

#### 422.7.2 DOCUMENTATION

Officers shall document in the appropriate Arrest-Investigation Report, the date and time the Combined Communications Center was notified of the foreign national's arrest/detention and his/her claimed nationality, and will note the name of the person contacted at the embassy/consulate.