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FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO ALL DIPLOMATIC AND CONSULAR POSTS IMMEDIATE
SPECIAL EMBASSY PROGRAM IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE IMMEDIATE
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UNCLAS STATE 029789
FOR CONSULAR SECTION CHIEFS AND NIV CHIEFS
E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: CVIS, CMGT, KOLY, GR

SUBJECT: VISA APPLICATIONS AND THE OLYMPIC GAMES IN GREECE

Ref: Athens 299

1. The Olympic (August 13-29) and Paralympic (September 17-28) Games will take place this year in Athens, Greece. Posts may see an increase in the demand for visas in the months of July and August, as travelers transit the U.S. (going either to or from the Games) or add U.S. stops to their itinerary. For many posts, the student application season will also begin around that time. Posts are encouraged to contact local media, sports groups, Chambers of Commerce and other contacts as appropriate with the message to "Apply Early!" for potential applicants who already know they need visas, particularly sponsors and committee members. Posts should also consider adding this information to their websites.
2. In addition to attempts to frontload applications early in the summer, posts should plan to schedule for late applications from many athletes, relatives and support staff who will qualify just weeks or days before the Games. Also, in the past, some Olympians and committee members have mistakenly assumed that Olympic accreditation or possession of an Olympic Identity Card allowed unrestricted travel to the U.S.; consular officers should use all available, appropriate channels to spread the word that visas are still required for US travel. With the future of TWOV uncertain, this is particularly relevant for many WHA travelers who must transit the US en route to or from Europe.
3. Reftel asked that consular chiefs also contact host country National Olympic Committee (NOC) members with this information. CA encourages all consular chiefs who have such contacts to do so. Meanwhile, the Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs (ECA) is discussing with the U.S. Olympic Committee (USOC) a strategy for reaching the NOCs. The USOC, remembering problems encountered with travelers departing the Dominican Republic and the Pan Am Games following the suspension of TWOV, is keen to ensure that all NOCs and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) are well informed about the need for visas and is exploring several options for doing so. CA will continue to coordinate with ECA on the notification of the NOCs.