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DHS Signs Visa Waiver Program Agreement with Korea

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Contact: 202-282-8010

U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Michael Chertoff signed today a Visa Waiver Program (VWP) Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Korean Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Yu Myung-hwan. The security enhancements outlined in the agreement puts Korea on the path toward visa-free travel to the U.S., and potential designation as a VWP member as early as later this year.

"I commend Korea for their collaboration on improving our bilateral security measures, and I share our partner's anticipation for the time when Korean visitors may travel without visas to the United States," said Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff. "In our global fight against violent extremism, cooperation is paramount against a patient and adaptive enemy. This agreement demonstrates that enhanced security can also facilitate legitimate travel, which is a win-win for both our nations."

The U.S. Congress authorized DHS in August 2007 to reform the VWP and strengthen the security arrangements required of existing participant countries, as well as to expand the conditions for aspiring countries to join the program.

Among the security enhancements required, DHS will establish an electronic system of travel authorization for air passengers. VWP travelers will be asked to provide some basic information online, which will generate an authorization number for travel. DHS will announce complete details on how the authorization systems will work, and when they will begin, later this year. VWP partners also must ensure reporting of lost and stolen passports to avoid fraudulent use and enhance security measures for airports that originate flights to the U.S., to include permitting air marshals on certain flights.

The VWP has been authorized by U.S. law for over 20 years, with 27 current members from Asia and Europe. The U.S. has signed enhanced VWP agreements with the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Slovakia, Hungary, Lithuania and Malta in recent weeks. Each country committed to meeting the new requirements of the program, to include an electronic system of travel authorization.

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