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DHS Begins Collecting 10 Fingerprints from International Visitors at New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport

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The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced today that it has begun collecting additional fingerprints from international visitors arriving at New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFK). The change is part of the department's upgrade from two- to 10-fingerprint collection to enhance security and facilitate legitimate travel by more accurately and efficiently establishing and verifying visitors' identities.

"Biometrics have revolutionized our ability to prevent dangerous people from entering the United States since 2004. Our upgrade to 10-fingerprint collection builds on our success, enabling us to focus more attention on stopping potential security risks," US-VISIT Director Robert Moczynski said.

For more than four years, U.S. Department of State (DOS) consular officers and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers have been collecting biometrics—digital fingerprints and a photograph—from all non-U.S. citizens between the ages of 14 and 79, with some exceptions, when they apply for visas or arrive at U.S. ports of entry.

"Quite simply, this change gives our officers a more accurate idea of who is in front of them. For legitimate visitors, the process becomes more efficient and their identities are better protected from theft. For those who may pose a risk, we will have greater insight into who they are," added Paul Morris, Executive Director of Admissibility and Passenger Programs, Office of Field Operations, CBP.

The department's US-VISIT program currently checks a visitor's fingerprints against DHS records of immigration violators and Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) records of wanted persons and known or suspected terrorists. Checking biometrics against the watch list helps officers make visa determinations and admissibility decisions. Collecting 10 fingerprints also improves fingerprint matching accuracy and the department's ability to compare a visitor's fingerprints against latent fingerprints collected by Department of Defense (DOD) and the FBI from known and unknown terrorists all over the world. Additionally, visitors' fingerprints are checked against the FBI's Criminal Master File.

On an average day at JFK, almost 14,400 international visitors complete US-VISIT biometric procedures. Visitors from Mexico, the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, France and Japan comprise the largest numbers of international visitors arriving at JFK.

JFK is the tenth port of entry to begin collecting 10 fingerprints from international visitors. Washington Dulles International Airport began 10-fingerprint collection on November 29, 2007. Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, Boston Logan International Airport, Chicago O'Hare International Airport, George Bush Houston Intercontinental Airport, San Francisco International Airport, Miami International Airport, Orlando International Airport and Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport have also begun 10-fingerprint collection.

US-VISIT is evaluating 10-fingerprint collection at these airports. It will use the results to inform the deployment of the technology to the remaining air, sea and land border ports of entry that will transition to collecting 10 fingerprints by December 2008.

Since US-VISIT began in 2004, DHS has used biometric identifiers to prevent the use of fraudulent

documents, protect visitors from identity theft, and stop thousands of criminals and immigration violators from entering the country. US-VISIT, in cooperation with CBP, is leading the transition to a 10-fingerprint collection standard. This upgrade is the result of an interagency partnership among DHS, FBI, DOD and DOS.

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