



Ministerial Statement  
Sen. the Hon. Michael M. Fahy, JP

## Removing the Requirement for Bermuda Entry Visas and Visa Waivers

Wednesday February 19<sup>th</sup> 2014

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**Madam President,** in an effort to streamline processes making it easier for persons to travel to Bermuda, the Department of Immigration is removing the requirement for Bermuda entry visas and visa waivers for all persons who plan to come to Bermuda as a tourist or business visitor or as a work permit holder. Two precedents have been set by previous administrations, paving the way and now making it easy to completely undertake this aim.

First, in December 2011, the then Ministry of National Security introduced a policy whereby business visitors and persons on a periodic, representative, temporary or salesman's permit did not require a Bermuda entry visa. To be landed, persons in these categories had to be in possession of a multi reentry visa (MRV) for the United States, Canada or the United Kingdom. Second, in May 20 12, an automatic visa waiver for the requirement for a Bermuda entry visa was implemented for tourist visitors from Brazil, Russia, India and China, only. Similar to the December 2011 change in policy, all persons from these countries had to be in possession of a MRV for the United States, Canada or the United Kingdom. All other tourists visitors listed on Bermuda's Visa Controlled Nationals list required a

Bermuda entry visa or could apply for a visa waiver. The visa waiver was not automatic and currently attracts a fee of \$200.00 per traveler.

No changes in policy were effected for work permit holders; i.e. all persons on standard work permits (1-10 years) required a Bermuda entry visa and were not permitted to apply for a visa waiver.

**Madam President**, consultation with the Department of Immigration on the effectiveness of the abovementioned changes revealed that in most cases, tourist and business visitors who, after some inquiries directly to the Department of Immigration, were more than satisfied that they either did not require a Bermuda entry visa or could apply for a visa waiver.

Accordingly, the Department of Immigration has identified benefits if Bermuda entry visas and visas waivers are no longer required for travel to Bermuda. These benefits include:

- a) Complete removal of the administrative burden by the Department of Immigration for reviewing visa referrals and processing visa waivers;
- b) Decrease in the number of inquiries to the Department of Immigration with respect to visa requirements;
- c) Increase in the number of visitor and business arrivals as a result of the streamlined process (less red tape);
- d) Increase in swifter arrivals to Bermuda of work permit holders; and

e) More satisfied employers and increases in employers' options when there is a need to recruit foreign nationals.

**Madam President,** in light of the details above, all tourist and business visitors and all work permit holders; including persons who have been issued a periodic, representative, temporary, salesman's or standard work permit, who require an MRV for the UK, US or Canada will be permitted to land in Bermuda without a Bermuda entry visa or visa waiver. By historical practice, travelers are aware of their individual requirements for transiting the UK, US or Canada and have not had a need to make such enquiries to the Department of Immigration.

It should be noted that from January 1<sup>st</sup> 2012 to December 31<sup>st</sup> 2013, the revenue stream for visa waiver requests totaled \$30,000.00 and that the Department of Immigration has never accrued revenue for referrals made to Bermuda for Bermuda entry visa applications. With the removal of visa waivers and the zero-base revenue stream, the Department of Immigration has offset this by other fee increases for the period 2014-16.

**Madam President,** we are confident that the current checks and balances provided by the various missions/embassies for the issuance of an MRV for the UK, US and Canada will continue to greatly assist us. In other words, with the removal of the requirement for Bermuda entry visas and visa waivers, we do not anticipate the introduction of heightened security challenges. However, to enhance the work of the missions/embassies and in an effort to mitigate the potential for persons being prevented from departing at their own volition because of an invalid MRV, a new requirement has been introduced. For all persons who require an MRV, the MRV must be valid for 45 days after the expiration of a visitor stay and/or of the work

permit. All such persons must also possess a passport that is valid for 45 days past the expiration of travel and/or of the work permit. In addition to these requirements, the Officers stationed at the L.F. Wade International Airport will continue to proactively review the passenger manifests for persons on the Bermuda Stop List. Such persons, as well as those whose MRV and passport validity is less than the time specified above, will not be landed.

**Madam President,** as a final comment, there are cases when an employer will apply for a new work permit for a person who is already resident in Bermuda and who requires an MRV. To this end, the Department of Immigration will not issue a work permit where the MRV is valid for less than the time being requested for the new work permit. Rather, in accordance with Section 130 of the Bermuda Immigration and Protection Act 1956, the Department of Immigration may request that the employer deposit a sum of money (estimated) with the Chief Immigration Officer, to cover the repatriation of the work permit holder and his/her dependents; including costs relating to the requirement for two Senior Immigration Inspectors to provide a travel escort to the home country. The employer will be required to deposit the sum of money prior to a decision on the work permit application. Additionally, an administration fee of \$200.00 will be charged to the employer should repatriation with assistance by the Department of Immigration be necessary.

**Madam President,** the effective date for abovementioned changes will be at March 1, 2014. The Department of Immigration will be formally notifying its industry partners; including Government House, the airlines, and employers, by February 21, 2014.

Removing the requirement for Bermuda entry visas and visa waivers is another step in the right direction. Not only does it allow the Department of Immigration to give focused attention on other applications, it also is a strong indicator that Bermuda is open for business.

**Thank you, Madam President.**