

Statement by Premier Hon. Alden McLaughlin, MBE, JP, MLA to the House
concerning UK issued passports
13 December, 2013

Protocol

Good day,

As all in this Honourable House are aware, I, along with a contingent including Minister for Financial Services and the Environment, the Hon. Wayne Panton, Joint Ministerial Council Sherpa, Jennifer Ahearn, Cabinet Secretary Samuel Rose and Chief Officer Eric Bush have just recently returned from a mostly successful JMC meeting in London.

While there was much we agreed on with the UK and other Overseas Territories at the gathering, there was one point of contention with the UK concerning the issuance of passports.

Madam Speaker we had a meeting with Home Office officials on the issue of replacing locally printed non-biometric "Cayman Islands" passports with UK printed biometric passports. It was debated heavily during the JMC and frankly, I have some grave concerns.

The "repatriation of passport printing" has been in the pipeline since 2006/7. While the programme has been delayed several times, there is now a December 2014 deadline for implementation. This will mean that after that date the Cayman Islands and the other OTs and CDs will not be able to issue our own passports as we have done for all these years.

The UK has presented the Overseas Territories with four options:

Option 1: A Cayman Islands specific variant passport, which would be cleared for issue by the Cayman Islands Passport and Corporate Office, and with a fully automated system, the passport details would be securely transmitted from Cayman to the UK. The passport would be printed in the UK and dispatched by the UK directly to the passport holder. Emergency travel passports would be issued in the Cayman Islands from the existing non-biometric stock.

Option 2: A Cayman Islands specific variant passport, which is cleared for issue by the Cayman Islands Passport Corporate Office, in non-automated fashion the passport details would be securely transmitted to the UK. The passport would be printed in the UK and dispatched by the UK office directly to the passport holder. Emergency travel passports would be issued in the Cayman Islands from the existing non-biometric stock.

Option 3: Cayman Islands passports would be retired and be replaced by full British Passports.

Option 4: A phased approach by implementing Option 2 and working to Option 1 over time.

Madam Speaker, none of the options reflect net improvements in the current passport issuance process for the Cayman Islands and leave me and my Administration, as I said, with some grave concerns, not the least of which are the prohibitively high costs of implementing the respective systems.

Implementing a fully automated system under Option 1 could cost the Cayman Islands an estimated KYD \$205,000 on local IT system modifications alone and in the Cayman dollars range of \$4.5 million to \$5.5 million on the UK systems, based on the costs incurred by Gibraltar for a similar implementation. This cost is to be borne by all OTs under that option. If the Cayman Islands is the only OT that chooses Option 1, then the cost will be borne solely by the Cayman Islands Government.

All of the options presented by the UK also include a scenario that would replace the Cayman Islands specific "Variant" of the British Passport with the standard issue British Passport without any reference to the Cayman Islands. We have requested that the UK printed bio-metric passports be Cayman Islands specific "Variants".

Madam Speaker, also of concern is the ability to issue local emergency passports. This is essential, often meaning the difference between life and death. Many in this House know of a recent incident in which a veteran seaman who hasn't travelled since he gave up his life at sea had a heart attack and had to be airlifted to Miami. He did not have a current passport, as he did not see the need for one. If we had not had the ability to produce an emergency passport for him, his family would be in mourning over his death at

this time of Christmas. Instead, I am happy to report, that we were able to provide the emergency passport and he is back home, as of this week, to celebrate this joyful time of year with his loved ones. We have asked that the Cayman Islands retain the ability to issue emergency passports here, on home soil.

Our current local stock levels for non-biometric are expected to last until December 2014; however, additional non-biometric passport stock will be required to address emergency passports in the future, and to facilitate the expected "run" on locally issued passports when the repatriation of passport production is announced. Additional expenditure on local passport systems and stocks will be necessary if the repatriation of passport printing is again deployed past the current December 2014 deadline.

We will be purchasing a large batch of non-biometric passport stock to prepare for long-term issuance of emergency passports. However, it is unknown when the United States will discontinue acceptance of non-biometric passports, which would be issued by the P&CSO for emergency travel.

Long-term provisions for locally printed emergency passports remain a concern as the providers of the laminate for the non-biometric stock of passports will no longer produce the laminate after this last batch. Therefore, once the stock is depleted, options for emergency passports are a critical unknown risk.

Madam Speaker, I have written a letter to FCO Minister Mark Simmonds outlining my concerns about the passports issues and have made some suggestions for a way forward for the Cayman Islands:

The Cayman Islands would like to participate in the passport printing repatriation project now being undertaken for Gibraltar and the Crown Dependencies. We see the work with Gibraltar as the most progressive option, reducing the costs to the Cayman Islands, while allowing the Cayman Islands to rapidly advance the repatriation variant passport printing.

We request a modification where that the UK printed passports are returned to the Cayman Islands Passport and Corporate Office for local distribution.

Madam Speaker, the ultimate desire of the Cayman Islands is to have a secure passport issuance regime that meets the needs of the Cayman Islands, which includes having Cayman Islands specific biometric passports that are internationally accepted, and "approved for issue" by the Cayman Islands, which once printed, are distributed locally by the Cayman Islands Passport and Corporate Office as well as the ability to issue bio-metric emergency passports here in Cayman.

I commend this statement to the House.

Thank you.