

For information

on 1 March 2011

Legislative Council Panel on Security
Outbound Travel Alert System

This paper updates Members on the operation of Outbound Travel Alert (OTA) system, particularly on its coverage and regular review, and sets out the operation of the system in the Egypt incident.

OTA System

2. The Security Bureau (SB) launched the three-tier OTA system in October 2009 to facilitate members of the public to better understand the possible risk to their personal safety when travelling overseas. The three levels of threat are represented by Amber, indicating a sign of threat, and residents should monitor the situation and exercise caution; Red, indicating significant threat, and residents should adjust travel plan and avoid non-essential travel; and Black, indicating severe threat, and all travel should be avoided.

3. When a large-scale incident occurs elsewhere which may affect the personal safety of Hong Kong residents, the SB will assess the risk and issue an OTA on a need basis. The main factors to be taken into consideration include:

- Level of threat to personal safety;
- Duration of the threat;
- Whether the threat is targeted at tourists;
- Whether the place is visited by many Hong Kong residents, etc.

In the assessment, we will obtain information on the local situation through various means, including the Office of Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the HKSAR (OCMFA) and the local Chinese Diplomatic and Consular Missions, the travel industry, consulates general in Hong Kong, as

well as the overseas Economic and Trade Offices of the HKSAR Government. We will also make reference to the travel information and alerts issued by other countries.

Improvements to the OTA System

OTA Coverage and Regular Review

4. To facilitate timely revision of the OTA coverage, we will conduct a relevant review every six months (tentatively in June and December every year). We will collect latest information on outbound travel of Hong Kong residents through various channels, including emerging trend for group tours from the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong (TIC), tourist information released by relevant countries, supplementary information provided by local consulates general, etc. Based on such information, we will consider putting places which have become popular destinations for Hong Kong residents under the OTA coverage, thereby providing residents with relevant and an expanded scope of information.

5. We have completed the first review on the OTA coverage in mid-February and decided to include 20 countries into the system, increasing the number of OTA countries from 60 to 80. Residents can better understand the travel risk assessment for more overseas destinations. We have announced the expanded OTA coverage on 24 February (see Annex). Apart from the regular half-yearly reviews, the HKSAR Government will also communicate with the TIC before peak season of outbound travel to affirm that the OTA coverage is in line with the travel preference of Hong Kong residents.

Enhancement of OTA Webpage

6. At the end of last year, we have enhanced the dissemination of information through the OTA webpage of the SB by creating hyperlinks to the travel risk information databases of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as the governments of Australia, the United Kingdom (UK) and Canada, to facilitate residents' access to travel risk assessment and travel alerts of other governments for a more comprehensive reference. A column "Other Information" was also added to provide relevant information of places which are not popular destinations of Hong Kong residents or outside the scope of the OTA system.

Registration of Outbound Travel Information

7. In fact, the Assistance to Hong Kong Residents Unit of the Immigration Department (ImmD) will provide assistance to Hong Kong residents in distress outside Hong Kong regardless of whether they are at a place covered by the OTA system. To this end, the ImmD launched the Registration of Outbound Travel Information service at the end of last year to enable Hong Kong residents to register their itineraries and contact details through the GovHK before departure. The ImmD will disseminate practical information to them through appropriate means, including SMS on mobile phones, when necessary.

Incident in Egypt

8. Since the outbreak of unrest in Egypt in late January 2011, the SB and the ImmD have been liaising with the OCMFA and the Chinese Embassy in Egypt (Chinese Embassy) as well as the Consulate General of Egypt in Hong Kong. Based on updated information collected from the TIC and through various channels, the SB issued an Amber OTA for Egypt on 28 January. In view of the rapidly worsening situation, particularly the imposition of curfew by the Government of Egypt on certain cities in the small hours on 29 January, Hong Kong time, the SB raised the OTA to Red in the same afternoon. We noted that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs advised Chinese nationals who intended to go to Egypt to seriously review their travel plans on the same day. Similar travel alerts for Egypt were also issued by the Australian, UK and Canadian governments.

9. As the situation in Egypt continued to deteriorate rapidly and violent confrontations spread to major tourist spots, like the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, and affected civilian areas, the Government of Egypt announced the imposition of a nationwide curfew at 10 pm on 29 January, Hong Kong time. The SB raised the OTA to Black on the following day. Similar alerts were issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and some overseas countries on the same day.

10. Following the issue of Red OTA on 29 January, the TIC decided on and announced the cancellation of all outbound tours to Egypt.

11. In the morning of 31 January, the TIC informed the SB that there were 213 persons (involving eight tour groups) in Luxor, while 61 tour group members were stranded in Cairo, and called on the HKSAR Government to arrange a chartered flight to bring them back. The HKSAR Government

urgently liaised with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs through the OCMFA and requested for assistance from the Central People's Government (CPG). The CPG decided to deploy a special flight, which successfully brought back all stranded Hong Kong residents from Luxor on 2 February. In addition, 13 Hong Kong residents took other special flights arranged by the CPG from Cairo to Beijing or Guangzhou, and transferred to Hong Kong with assistance from the HKSAR Government's offices in Beijing and Guangdong. Other Hong Kong residents in Cairo returned to Hong Kong by flights arranged by their own travel agencies. Up to 3 February, the Assistance to Hong Kong Residents Unit of the ImmD received a total of 47 assistance requests, all of which were settled.

**Security Bureau
February 2011**

Outbound Travel Alert System extended to cover 80 countries

The coverage of Outbound Travel Alert (OTA) System has been extended today (February 24) from 60 countries to 80. The 20 newly added countries (Annex 1) are tourist destinations which have become more popular among Hong Kong residents.

A Security Bureau spokesperson said, “The Security Bureau reviews the coverage of the OTA system regularly to ensure the system meets the need of the residents and provides information on safety risk for Hong Kong residents travelling abroad.”

“Since late last year, we have enhanced the dissemination of information at the OTA webpage of the Security Bureau. There are hyperlinks to the travel risk information databases compiled by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, Australian, British and Canadian governments, helping residents to obtain more information about travel risk. We have also added a column of ‘Other information’ releasing relevant information of places which are outside the scope of the OTA,” the spokesperson said.

After assessing the situation of the 20 newly added countries, the Security Bureau today issued a Red OTA for Lebanon and Tunisia, and an Amber OTA for Albania, Qatar and Syria. The OTA currently in force is at Annex 2.

“Outbound travel is a personal decision, but the Government encourages Hong Kong residents to take heed of the OTA before firming up their travel plans,” the spokesperson added.

Residents outside Hong Kong who need assistance may call the 24-hour hotline (852) 1868 of the Assistance to Hong Kong Residents Unit of the Immigration Department.

OTA webpage of the Security Bureau is at:
<http://www.sb.gov.hk/eng/ota/> .

24 February 2011

20 newly added countries covered by OTA system

Albania
Argentina
Belarus
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Chile
Estonia
Fiji
Ireland
Latvia
Lebanon
Liechtenstein
Lithuania
Macedonia
Malta
Montenegro
Peru
Qatar
Slovak Republic
Syria
Tunisia

OTA currently in force

OTA	Countries
Black	Philippines Egypt
Red	Bahrain Lebanon * Tunisia *
Amber	Albania * India Indonesia Iran Jordan Nepal Pakistan Qatar * Russia Syria * Thailand

* Issued on 24 February 2011