

I will try to end the humiliation of foreign tourists to the USA but only if 200 Americans will help by writing to their representatives.

– Judith Meyer, Concerned traveller

More details: As we speak, millions of tourists begin their trip to the USA with an experience of intense humiliation. Before they are able to see any welcoming face, airport officials of the Department of Homeland Security take the fingerprints of their left and right index fingers and their photograph, much like the police takes fingerprints of people suspected of a serious crime. In contrast to the police however, the fingerprints are taken *every single time*, that is on 30 flights out of 30 for a businessman who routinely has to travel to the USA, even if the trips are only a week apart. And not for reason of having deleted the data in the meantime - the American government indefinitely saves even the most minute detail about tourists they have no reason to suspect, from the credit card information to the meal they have chosen on the plane. This system was deployed by the Department of Homeland Security on December 31st 2003 and is known as US-VISIT. Only Canadians and Mexicans are temporarily exempt, European tourists for example are not, even though they are exempt from needing visas.

The practice of taking fingerprints of unsuspected foreign travelers is unworthy of a country that claims to consider everybody 'innocent until proven guilty', and it almost seems as if they were trying to make tourists feel humiliated and uncomfortable on purpose, because I can't see any reason to take fingerprints repeatedly - they can't change. No other country takes fingerprints of innocent visitors, except for Brazil, which chose this way of responding to this unacceptable American policy (Brazil only takes fingerprints of Americans).

Most Americans do not know about this policy. Even members of the Department of Homeland Security are not necessarily aware of it, because it only made headlines overseas. When told about it, most Americans are appalled, but a few Americans have shown support for it, pointing out that there are criminals among foreigners. I am unaware of the fingerprinting having led to even a single criminal being arrested, but even if it did, the current discrimination against foreigners is still unacceptable. Because we know that there are criminals among Americans, America has a higher rate of serious crimes than a lot of other developed countries, and America-based criminals would have a lot more time and opportunity to commit a crime than a tourist just visiting for a week or two... so even if you believe in fingerprinting everybody in order to have a somewhat better chance to catch a small percentage of criminals, American citizens should be the first to be fingerprinted. Limiting the practice to foreigners screams of prejudices, of government-approved xenophobia.

That's why you and I and everybody else should stand up against it, bring it to the public attention and pressure officials to end this practice that disrespects human rights.

If you are American, sign this pledge and write to your representative in Congress, asking him to stop the fingerprinting of people who are not suspect. Please also feel free to write to anybody else who could make a difference and spread the knowledge that this practice is taking place, as the media are silent. This way you can contribute to making tourists feel welcome in your country and enjoy their stay, just as you'd hope to feel when traveling elsewhere.

If you are not American, sign my other pledge at <http://www.pledgebank.com/Fingerprints> and promise not to visit the USA until they have changed their policy, if the trip is at all avoidable. I am not expecting you to stay home if an American relative falls seriously ill or something, but do not go on touristy trips. The American government has to be made to see that if they treat tourists like criminals, tourists will wander off to countries where they are welcomed with open arms.

Pledge at www.pledgebank.com/FingerprintsUSA

This pledge closes on **6th November 2008**. Thanks!

Remember, you only have to act if 200 other people sign up – that's what PledgeBank is all about.

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