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U.S. Launches Visa Bond Program Targeting Malawi and Zambia to Curb Overstays

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The United States Department of State will implement a yearlong pilot program requiring certain travelers from Malawi and Zambia to post a substantial bond when applying for

U.S. tourism or business visas. The initiative, set to begin August 20, 2025, is designed to deter visa overstays, a recurring concern for U.S. immigration enforcement.

Under the program, visa applicants from the two African nations, both identified by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) as having high overstay rates, may be required to pay up to $15,000. The typical bond will be set at $10,000 for adults and $5,000 for children, determined during the visa interview. The bond will be refunded if all visa terms are honored. Travelers enrolled in the Visa Waiver Program, which allows stays of up to 90 days without a visa for tourism or business, are not subject to the policy.

State Department officials emphasized that the measure addresses both national security and immigration compliance. “This targeted, common-sense measure reinforces the administration’s commitment to U.S. immigration law while deterring visa overstays,” spokesperson Tammy Bruce told reporters. The department also noted the countries were selected based on overstay statistics, screening and vetting deficiencies, and broader foreign policy considerations.

According to DHS data, nonimmigrant visa holders from Malawi and Zambia exceeded their authorized stays at higher-than-average rates. The fiscal year 2023 ended with more than 510,000 suspected in-country overstays nationwide, representing 1.3 percent of expected departures. Other countries with significant overstay rates include Colombia, Brazil, Haiti, Ecuador, and Spain.

Reactions from the targeted countries have been critical. Zambia’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mulambo Haimbe, expressed “serious concern” over the potential economic impact on trade, investment, tourism, and people-to-people exchanges. He added that the decision contradicts discussions held with U.S. Ambassador Michael Gonzales in July, which focused on strengthening bilateral ties. Malawi’s embassy stated it had not been officially informed of the policy and declined further comment.

The program includes additional restrictions: travelers under the bond requirement must enter and exit the U.S. through one of three airports, John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York, Boston Logan International Airport, or Washington Dulles International

Airport. If an applicant is denied entry at a U.S. port of entry, the bond will be reimbursed; however, overstaying will result in forfeiture.

Critics argue the policy is excessive. David Bier, director of immigration studies at the Cato Institute, described it as “incoherent” and likely to deter legitimate travel altogether rather than ensure compliance. Industry experts also warn of potential economic fallout, with the U.S. Travel Association reporting an 11.6 percent drop in overseas visitors in March and predicting further losses to the tourism sector.

The pilot program is scheduled to run until August 5, 2026, and may expand to other countries with high overstay rates. It forms part of the Trump administration’s broader effort to tighten visa requirements and enforce U.S. immigration laws.