

## **Help for American Victims of Crime Overseas**

(Article from: [http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/emergencies/emergencies\\_1748.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/emergencies/emergencies_1748.html))

The Bureau of Consular Affairs, Overseas Citizens Services is committed to assisting American citizens who become victims of crime while traveling, working, or residing abroad. Government officials, known as consuls or consular officers, at embassies and consulates in nearly 250 cities throughout the world are responsible for assisting U.S. citizens who may be traveling, working, or residing abroad. In addition, in approximately 50 cities where a significant number of Americans reside or visit and there is no U.S. embassy or consulate, consular agents provide emergency assistance to U.S. citizens. Consuls, consular agents, and local employees work with their counterparts in the Bureau of Consular Affairs Overseas Citizens Services Office in Washington, D.C. to provide emergency and non-emergency services to Americans abroad.

### **How to Contact Us**

Consular duty personnel are available for emergency assistance 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, at embassies, consulates, and consular agencies overseas and in Washington, D.C. To contact the Office of Overseas Citizens Services in the U.S. call 1-888-407-4747 (during business hours) or 202-647-5225 (after hours). Contact information for U.S. embassies, consulates, and consular agencies overseas is on this Internet site.

### **If You Are the Victim of a Crime Overseas**

Contact the nearest U.S. embassy, consulate, or consular agency for assistance.

Contact local police to report the incident and obtain immediate help with safety concerns. Request a copy of the police report.

### **Consular Assistance to American Crime Victims**

Consular personnel can provide assistance to crime victims. When a U.S. citizen becomes the victim of a crime overseas, he or she may suffer physical, emotional, or financial injuries. Additionally, the emotional impact of the crime may be intensified because the victim is in unfamiliar surroundings. The victim may not be near sources of comfort and support, fluent in the local language, or knowledgeable about local laws and customs.

Consuls, consular agents, and local employees at overseas posts are familiar with local government agencies and resources in the country where they work. They can help American crime victims with issues such as:

Replacing a stolen passport;

Contacting family, friends, or employers;

Obtaining appropriate medical care;

Addressing emergency needs that arise as a result of the crime;

Obtaining general information about the local criminal justice process and information about your case;

Obtaining information about local resources to assist victims, including foreign crime victim compensation programs;

Obtaining information about crime victim assistance and compensation programs in the U.S.; and

Obtaining a list of local attorneys who speak English.

Consular officials cannot, however, investigate crimes, provide legal advice or represent you in court, serve as official interpreters or translators, or pay legal, medical, or other fees for you.

### **Individual Reactions to Crime Victimization**

How individuals react to being the victim of a crime will vary from person to person. Reactions are affected by individual factors such as how the victim handles stress, the nature and duration of the crime, the physical safety of the victim, and the number and type of support systems available. Reactions to a crime may be immediate or delayed. The physical, emotional, or cognitive (involving thinking ability) symptoms a victim may experience could include nausea, headaches, fatigue, hyperventilation, or sleeping problems. Some victims report feelings of anxiety or fear, hyper-vigilance, guilt, anger, or isolation. Some experience difficulty making decisions, short-term memory problems, difficulty concentrating, or recurring memories of the crime.

It is important to realize that these are normal feelings, behaviors and reactions to an abnormal event. One of the first things to pay attention to is your need to feel safer. Addressing safety concerns and receiving emotional support can help. For most victims the reactions described above diminish with time. If these reactions persist and are disrupting your life or getting worse after three or four weeks, you should consider seeking professional assistance.

### **Resources and Information for Crime Victims:**

*Victim Assistance* : If you are the victim of a crime while overseas you may benefit from specialized resources for crime victims available in the U.S. Throughout the United

States thousands of local crime victim assistance programs offer help to victims of violent crime and most will help residents of their community who have been the victim of a crime in another country. These include rape crisis counseling programs, shelter and counseling programs for battered women, support groups and bereavement counseling for family members of homicide victims, diagnostic and treatment programs for child abuse victims, assistance for victims of drunk driving crashes, and others. Information about locating crime victim assistance programs is below.

*Victim Compensation* : All states operate crime victim compensation programs and nearly half of them offer benefits to their residents who are victims of violent crime overseas. (See contact information for state compensation programs below.) These state compensation programs provide financial assistance to eligible victims for reimbursement of expenses such as medical treatment, counseling, funeral costs, lost income or loss of support, and others. Generally victim compensation programs require the victim to report the crime to law enforcement and they usually request a copy of the police report.

### **Contact Information for Victim Compensation and Assistance Programs:**

Information about each state's crime victim compensation program and how to apply for compensation is available on the Internet at the web site of the National Association of Crime Victim Compensation Boards, <http://www.nacvcb.org>

The toll-free 24 hours a day /7 days a week hotline for sexual assault crisis counseling and referrals in the United States is 1-800-656-HOPE. It is operated by a non-profit organization, RAINN (Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network), which also has information on the Internet at <http://www.rainn.org>

Information about local sexual assault victim assistance programs in the U.S. is also available from each state's sexual assault coalition. Contact information for these state coalitions are listed at the website of the U.S. Department of Justice Violence Against Women Office, <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/vawo/help.htm>

The toll-free 24 hours a day /7 days a week National Domestic Violence Hotline, which provides crisis counseling and referrals in the U.S., is 1-800-799-SAFE.

Information about local domestic violence victim assistance programs in the U.S. is also available from each state's domestic violence coalition. Contact information for these state coalitions is listed at the website of the U.S. Department of Justice Violence Against Women Office, <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/vawo/help.htm>

The toll-free 24 hours a day /7 days a week crisis counseling and referral line for families and friends of those who have died by violence is 1-888-818-POMC. It is operated by a non-profit organization, POMC, Inc., (The National Organization of Parents of Murdered Children) which also has information on the Internet at <http://www.pomc.org>

Information about national and local resources for victims and family members of victims of drunk driving crashes is available at the web site of Mothers Against Drunk Driving, <http://www.madd.org>

Contact information for non-emergency victim assistance services in communities throughout the U.S. is available at the web site of the U.S. Department of Justice Office for Victims of Crime, <http://ovc.ncjrs.org/findvictimservices/>

Information for crime victims on the impact of crime, safety planning, legal rights and civil legal remedies, and options for assistance and referrals to local programs is also available from the National Crime Victim Center. Call toll free (8:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. EST) 1-800-FYI-CALL or call TTY for hearing impaired (8:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. EST) 1-800-211-7996. Information is also available on the Internet at <http://www.ncvc.org>

Information and referral to victim assistance programs is available from the National Organization for Victim Assistance (NOVA). Call toll-free 24 hours a day /7 days a week 1-800-TRY-NOVA. Information is also available on the Internet at <http://www.try-nova.org>

Information about victim assistance programs in approximately 20 countries is available at the web site of Victim Assistance On-line, <http://www.vaonline.org>