



Precautionary measures and behaviour in crisis situations

1. Introduction/general remarks

One of the standard duties of an embassy is to draw attention to potential threats and corresponding precautionary measures. This document should not be regarded as a reaction to changes in the security situation, but rather as a source of information and advice concerning generally necessary precautions. In the event of any specific changes in the security situation, you will receive details in a separate communication.

Sri Lanka

The civil war ended in May 2009. The political climate remains tense and the state of emergency remains in force. Up to date, foreigners (tourists and residents) have been spared by the various groups. It is not impossible that this situation will change.

Maldives

Due to a constitutional crisis in the first half of July 2010 some violent clashes have occurred in the capital Malé. The political tensions could lead to further demonstrations in the capital

The danger of being at the wrong place at the wrong time is real in both countries, especially in the vicinity of military installations and convoys or official buildings.

The following, more classic risks should also be mentioned and could have an serious impact:

a) **natural disasters** are rare but cannot be predicted. They can have disastrous consequences, as the tsunami of 2004 or the floods of 2010 reminded us.

b) **road accidents** are happening often due to the ever increasing traffic on the main roads. The roads are often in poor condition and too narrow for all the cars, trucks, buses and motorbikes. The lack of discipline of drivers does not help. Bus accidents can have devastating consequences.

c) **train accidents** happen relatively often but are seldom tragic due to the age of the railroad network which does not permit high speeds.

d) **tropical diseases** are numerous and similar to those in other countries with the same climate. You should especially protect yourself against dengue fever, which occurs in the neighbourhoods of Colombo and during the rainy season.

On the DFA travel advice page (www.eda.admin.ch/reisehinweise) you will find a current assessment of the security situation in each country. Should you have any questions relating to security, please do not hesitate to contact this embassy.

This document provides hints on how to prepare for a crisis and how you should behave if one actually occurs. For information about other aspects of living abroad, we recommend consulting one of our special brochures („Wenn einer eine Reise tut...“ and „Ratgeber für Auslandschweizer“), which you can obtain directly from us or download from the Internet (www.eda.admin.ch > Reisen und Leben im Ausland > Reisen bzw. > Leben im Ausland). The above-mentioned web sites also contain a variety of other useful documents and information sheets.

This embassy has contact people ready who will try to keep contact with Swiss nationals in the event of a crisis. Assembly areas exist in case an evacuation should be necessary. Please find out who your contact is, who his or her deputy is, and where your assembly area is located.

In the case of a crisis, this embassy only has limited means of helping you. For this reason it is important that you assume responsibility for your own safety and take appropriate precautions.

2. Precautionary measures

The following items should always be kept close at hand in case a crisis should occur:

- Valid passport/ID (obtaining a new passport can take up to 40 days), plus (where applicable) driver's licence and vehicle papers, residence permit and exit visa, valid entry visa, vaccination certificate for country of destination, and any other important documents
- Cash and foreign currency reserves, credit cards, bank cards
- List of important phone numbers and other details (relatives and friends, embassy and contact person, police, fire brigade, ambulance service, doctor, numbers of your passport, bank account(s), credit cards, social insurance, other insurance policies, blood group, etc.)
- Emergency supplies of drinking water, foodstuffs (possibly a portable cooker), fuel and any medication you depend on
- Portable first-aid kit, including antibiotics and painkillers
- Battery-operated (short-wave) radio, flashlight plus spare batteries
- Mobile phone, fully charged spare battery or charger that does not require mains power supply, plus adequate call credit
- Fire extinguisher
- This information sheet

You can minimise the risk of damage or losses by taking certain precautions:

- Have your house and its installations and household systems inspected for safety (resistance to earthquakes, fire, flooding and storms), and be sure to install smoke detectors/fire alarms.
- Ensure that all walls, doors and windows are properly burglar-proofed and if necessary hire the services of a security firm.
- Pre-arrange a meeting place with your family to be used in case access to your house should be cut off.
- Find out about escape routes to the border, the nearest shelter and the nearest assembly area.
- Make sure you have all necessary vaccinations.
- Plan for the possibility that you will have to leave pets behind in case of evacuation.
- Find out about other safety precautions (e.g. www.svv.ch > **Konsumenteninfo** > **Prävention**, www.bag.admin.ch, www.seismo.ethz.ch > Info, www.who.int, www.fema.gov, www.travel.state.gov/travel, www.gfz-potsdam.de, www.safecanada.ca > Conseils pour les individus et leur famille / Self-Help Advice for Families and Individuals, www.ready.gov).
- Subscribe to an SMS alerts service (e.g. <http://www.tsunami-alarm-system.com>).

Crises can give rise to major material losses, so be sure to take the necessary precautions:

- Soliswiss insurance (www.soliswiss.ch) against loss of means of existence due to political crises
- Building and contents insurance including disaster cover (be sure to frequently update the inventory of contents!)
- Health, accident and/or travel insurance, including cover for medical treatment abroad and repatriation, and/or membership of REGA rescue service (www.rega.ch)
- Keep copies of important documents (passports, insurance policies, contracts, inventories, pension card, CV, etc.) in a safe place, e.g. with relatives in Switzerland

It is also advisable to:

- Take out life insurance
- Grant power of attorney to your spouse or partner
- Have your will kept in a safe place (e.g. deposited at the embassy/ or with a solicitor in Switzerland)

Notify the embassy about changes of address and phone numbers (including mobile phones), e-mail addresses, etc., so that you can be contacted without delay in case of an emergency.

3. Behaviour in the event of an impending crisis

When the first signs of a developing crisis become apparent, ensure that you have taken all necessary precautionary measures. Notify the embassy about any visitors arriving from Switzerland, or ask them to complete the registration form for persons in transit (which is posted

on the embassy web site if the threat of a crisis increases), and send it to the embassy. You should also notify the latter about any temporary periods of absence from the country.

In the event of an immediate threat, the embassy may issue cover letters to protect Swiss property against confiscation, wrongful seizure, requisition, damage and other harmful occurrences by identifying it as such.

Crises can escalate very rapidly, with the result that escape routes may be blocked and (safe) evacuation may become impossible. If evacuation becomes necessary, this is usually associated with high risk and you will only be able to take the barest of necessities with you. Switzerland does not have troops at its disposal for assisting with the evacuation of its citizens from foreign countries, and this means it has to rely on the goodwill and assistance of friendly states.

If the situation grows increasingly hazardous, wherever possible it is best to make your own way out of the country while this is still possible, though certainly not later than after the embassy/ issues the necessary recommendations. A recommendation to evacuate will normally only be made if this is unavoidable in view of the existing circumstances and expected developments, and as long as circumstances permit, the procedure comprises three stages:

- Alarm level 1: Recommendation to send family members out of the country, if there are clear indications of an impending breakdown of law and order.
- Alarm level 2: Recommendation to leave the country independently, if law and order are on the verge of collapse but it is still possible to leave in safety.
- Alarm level 3: Recommendation to participate in organised evacuation, if it becomes dangerous to remain in the country and it is no longer possible to leave safely without assistance.

If it becomes too dangerous to leave the country or organise an evacuation, and/or the crisis is expected to ease again before long, the embassy may recommend that you stay in your house, office or hotel.

Wherever possible, the embassy will keep you informed about the development of the situation by issuing circulars, but it is unable to guarantee your safety. In a crisis, communication networks often break down, and this means you yourself are responsible for any decision you may make to stay in the country or leave it, and you also have to bear the associated costs and risks yourself. But be sure to notify the embassy about your intentions and any absences from your place of residence during a crisis.

4. Behaviour in a crisis situation

- Keep yourself informed about the situation by watching TV, listening to the radio (YES FM 89,5, BBC 95,6 for Colombo, 90.8 for the South, 98,4 for the Hill Country) and via the Internet (www.slbc.lk, www.yesfmonline.com, www.defence.lk). Keep calm, and do not pay too much attention to rumours.
- Keep in touch with the Swiss embassy or the designated contact. General information (e.g. recommendations for leaving the country) is published on the corresponding web site (www.eda.admin.ch/country).
- Keep in touch with your relatives in Switzerland who will be worrying about you.
- Unrest: Stay in your house, office or hotel, and be sure to securely close all doors and shutters. If you happen to be somewhere else (e.g. travelling), make your way home as quickly as possible. Keep away from windows and if possible remain in a protected room in the middle of the house and await further developments. As a rule, unrest tends to ease again within one to three days.
- If you unavoidably have to leave your house, office or hotel, keep away from large gatherings, congested roads and crossroads. Where possible use a vehicle that does not attract attention, and be sure to lock the doors and windows. Do not carry any valuables or objects/documents that might arouse suspicion. If you leave your house frequently, be sure to do so at different times of day and use a different route each time.
- Obey the instructions of law-enforcement officers immediately and without contradiction.
- Never resist someone who is armed. Avoid any form of provocation (sudden movements, eye contact or aggressive staring, mention of political topics), bring your family into play, play down your own importance, do not give an armed person any reason to punish you.
- In the case of hostage-taking, the best strategy is passive co-operation. Try to establish a rapport with the kidnappers. If you are held for a lengthy period of time, draw up a daily schedule with mental and physical exercises. Make a mental note of all your observations. Do not try to escape unless you are absolutely certain of success and are sure you will not endanger other hostages.

- Fire inside a building: If you are in a room full of smoke, keep your head as close to the floor as possible, do not open any doors if they feel hot, and never use a lift.
- Earthquake: If you are inside a building, shelter beneath a solid table, bed, door frame or beside an interior support wall. If you are outside, keep well away from buildings, streetlights, electricity masts and tall trees, and avoid bridges and subways. If the house is damaged, switch off the heating, main gas feed and main power supply.
- Tsunami: If you are near the coast and you feel an earth tremor or see the sea level rise or fall unexpectedly rapidly, hurry to high ground or to a safe location away from the coast and stay there until the all-clear has been given, though for at least an hour.
- Epidemic: Act in accordance with the recommendations of the local authorities, the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health (www.bag.admin.ch) and the World Health Organization (www.who.int).
- Help others if you do not put yourself in danger as a result.
- Be sure to notify the embassy if you intend to leave (or have left) your place of residence or the country.

5. Evacuation

- As a rule, an evacuation is made from a designated assembly area which will be communicated.
- The embassy will inform you about any planned evacuation and, in the event of sustained danger, will try to give you instructions on the best way to reach the assembly area.
- If you should lose contact with the embassy or its designated contact, stay where you are for as long as possible if the situation is precarious. You should not proceed to the assembly area unless you are instructed to do so.
- The embassy will repeatedly try to contact you. The possibility cannot be ruled out that attempts are being made to locate you at your last-known address.
- When you proceed to the assembly area, you should take your passport and other important documents, plus cash, water and provisions for several days, a portable first-aid kit, sleeping bag or blankets, spare clothes and hygiene articles. As a rule, heavy luggage cannot be transported.
- Other than in cases of urgent need, you will be required to bear all risks and costs associated with an evacuation (flight costs, etc.).

26.01.2011