



December 31, 2013

PM-602-0096

Policy Memorandum

SUBJECT: Implementation of New Discretionary Exemption Under INA Section 212(d)(3)(B)(i) For Activities and Associations Relating to the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF)

Purpose

On October 2, 2013, following consultation with the Secretary of State and the Attorney General, the Acting Secretary of Homeland Security (the “Acting Secretary”) exercised his discretionary authority not to apply certain terrorism-related inadmissibility grounds to certain aliens for voluntary activities or associations relating to the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF).¹ See attachment. Specifically, the exercise of authority permits exemption of the following activities:

- Solicitation of funds or other things of value for;
- Solicitation of any individuals for membership in;
- Provision of material support to; or
- Receipt of military-type training from, or on behalf of, the OLF.

This Policy Memorandum (PM) guides USCIS adjudicators on implementation of the Acting Secretary’s exemption.²

Scope

Unless specifically exempted herein, this PM applies to and binds all USCIS employees.

¹ This policy memorandum (PM) expressly does not apply to persons whom a U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) officer knows, or has reasonable grounds to believe, is engaged in or is likely to engage after entry in any terrorist activity. Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) section 212(a)(3)(B)(i)(II); 8 U.S.C § 11822(a)(3)(B)(i)(II).

² This PM supplements existing guidance on terrorism-related inadmissibility grounds (TRIG), including Jonathan Scharfen, Deputy Director, USCIS, “Processing the Discretionary Exemption to the Inadmissibility Ground for Providing Material Support to Certain Terrorist Organizations,” May 24, 2007; Michael L. Aytes, Acting Deputy Director, USCIS, “Implementation of Section 691 of Division J of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2008, and Updated Processing Requirements for Discretionary Exemptions to Terrorist Activity Inadmissibility Grounds,” July 28, 2008; Michael Aytes, Acting Deputy Director, USCIS, “Revised Guidance on the Adjudication of Cases involving Terrorist-Related Inadmissibility Grounds and Amendment to the Hold Policy for such Cases,” February 13, 2009; and PM-602-0051, “Revised Guidance on the Adjudication of Cases Involving Terrorism-Related Inadmissibility Grounds (TRIG) and Further Amendment to the Hold Policy for Such Cases,” November 21, 2011.

Authorities

- INA section 212(d)(3)(B)(i)
- 8 U.S.C. § 1182 (d)(3)(B)(i)

Background

The OLF is a political opposition group founded in 1973 which is engaged in prolonged conflict with the Ethiopian government. It qualifies as a Tier III terrorist organization under INA section 212(a)(3)(B)(vi)(III) on the basis of its violent activities.

INA section 212(a)(3)(B), 8 U.S.C. § 1182(a)(3)(B), renders inadmissible and ineligible for most immigration benefits an alien who engages in terrorist activity with any organization that, at the time of the interaction, was a terrorist organization. In turn, INA section 212(d)(3)(B)(i), 8 U.S.C. § 1182(d)(3)(B)(i), authorizes the Secretary to exempt certain terrorism-related grounds of inadmissibility in certain cases. On October 2, 2013, the Acting Secretary issued an exemption that authorizes USCIS not to apply the inadmissibility grounds to certain qualified aliens who provided material support to, solicited funds or other things of value for, solicited individuals for membership in, or received military-type training from, or on behalf of, the OLF.

This exemption may be applied to immigration benefit and protection applications under the INA, including, but not limited to, asylum, refugee status, adjustment of status, and asylee and refugee following-to-join petitions, as provided in Section II of this guidance. USCIS will consider an exemption only if the threshold requirements, listed below and in the Acting Secretary's Exercise of Authority, are met.

Policy

Pursuant to the Acting Secretary's exercise of authority under INA section 212(d)(3)(B)(i), 8 U.S.C. § 1182(d)(3)(B)(i), USCIS will consider whether certain aliens are eligible for and warrant an exemption from terrorism-related inadmissibility grounds.

Implementation

I. Identifying Individuals Subject to Terrorism-Related Inadmissibility Grounds Due to Activities or Associations with the OLF

Adjudicators who consider an exemption must familiarize themselves with country conditions information on the relevant country and terrorist organization(s) by consulting the [Refugee, Asylum & International Operations Virtual Library \(RAIO-VL\)](#) and/or the research information made available through and authorized by their HQ components.³ In addition to research products generated by USCIS, open source reference documents produced by other agencies may be available from the U.S. Department of State (DOS) (e.g., the annual [U.S. Dept. of State Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#)), or through the [DHS Library](#) on the intranet.

³ DHS employees may access the [RAIO-VL's Country of Origin Information Collection](#).

Adjudicators will review for indications in benefit applications, supporting documentation, and testimony, of activities or associations relating to the OLF. In all cases, adjudicators will review and elicit information about all TRIG-related activities or associations.⁴

II. Aliens Whose Inadmissibility for TRIG Activities or Associations Relating to the OLF May Be Exempted as a Matter of Discretion

Applicability of Earlier Exercises of Exemption Authority

This Exercise of Authority is designed to address scenarios involving voluntary activities or associations with OLF. Earlier exercises of authority exempted these terrorist activities if they occurred while under duress; these exemptions remain in effect and may be used as appropriate in cases not covered by this exemption. *See* 72 Fed.Reg. 9958 (effective March 6, 2007) – material support under duress to Tier III organizations; 72 Fed.Reg. 26138 (effective April 27, 2007) – material support under duress to Tier I and II organizations; 76 Fed.Reg. 14418 (effective January 7, 2011) – receipt of military-type training by or on behalf of a terrorist organization under duress; and, 76 Fed.Reg. 14419 (effective January 7, 2011) – solicitation of funds or individuals for a terrorist organization under duress.

Because this Exercise of Authority is specifically crafted to exempt certain terrorist activities related to the OLF, the August 10, 2012 Exercise of Authority for certain aliens with existing immigration benefits does not apply to scenarios involving voluntary activities or associations with the OLF. *See* 77 Fed.Reg. 49821 (effective August 10, 2012).

Existing or Pending Immigration Benefit or Beneficiary of an I-730

To be eligible for this exemption, the applicant must already have an existing or pending immigration benefit such that the applicant:

- On or before October 2, 2013, was admitted as a refugee or granted asylum, or had an asylum or refugee application pending; or
- Is the beneficiary of an I-730 Refugee/Asylee Relative Petition filed at any time by a petitioner who was an asylee or refugee on or before October 2, 2013.

⁴ If additional terrorism-related grounds apply, adjudicators should determine whether there are available exemptions for those additional grounds and determine whether the applicant is eligible for those exemptions. If so, adjudicators should adjudicate all appropriate exemptions according to the guidance issued for each exemption. An adjudicator may grant an exemption for activities or associations relating to OLF only if there are available exemptions for all applicable TRIG-related activities, and if the adjudicator has recommended an exemption for each ground of inadmissibility.

Threshold Eligibility

USCIS may only consider a discretionary exemption for those cases on hold solely because of TRIG-related activities or associations relating to OLF, regardless of whether such conduct occurred under duress. To be considered for an exemption, in addition to meeting the requirements described in this PM under *Existing or Pending Immigration Benefit or Beneficiary of an I-730*, an applicant must also satisfy the following threshold requirements:

- Establish that he or she is otherwise eligible for the immigration benefit or protection being sought;
- Undergo and pass all required background and security checks;
- Fully disclose, to the best of his or her knowledge, in all relevant applications and interviews with U.S. Government representatives and agents, the nature and circumstances of all activities or associations falling within the scope of INA section 212(a)(3)(B), 8 U.S.C. § 1182(a)(3)(B);⁵
- Establish that he or she has not participated in, or knowingly provided material support to, terrorist activities that targeted noncombatant persons or U.S. interests;
- Establish that he or she has not engaged in terrorist activity in association with the OLF outside the context of civil war activities directed against military, intelligence, or related forces of the Ethiopian government;
- Establish that he or she poses no danger to the safety and security of the United States; and
- Establish that he or she warrants an exemption in the totality of the circumstances as discussed in the following paragraph.

Questions relating to the threshold requirements must be directed through the component chain of command to the component USCIS TRIG Working Group point of contact.

Discretion

For those applicants who have met all other threshold requirements, adjudicators will consider whether the applicant warrants a discretionary exemption in the totality of circumstances. When considering the totality of the circumstances, factors to be considered, in addition to the threshold factors stated above, may include, among others:

- The length and nature of the TRIG-related activity;
- The amount, type, frequency, and nature of the applicant's activity;
- The nature of the organization's terrorist activities and the alien's awareness of those activities;
- The alien's conduct since the association with OLF;
- The length of time that has elapsed since the alien engaged in the TRIG-related activity; and
- Any other relevant factors.

⁵ To fully disclose TRIG-related activities and associations entails credible, persuasive, consistent and complete representations by the applicant of all involvement in such activities. If this level of disclosure has not been provided, the applicant has failed to meet this threshold criterion and is ineligible for exemption consideration.

III. Making the Exemption Determination⁶

A. Vetting Cases for Possible National Security Concern

Adjudicators will follow existing agency procedures when a possible national security concern arises during the course of the adjudication, including through security checks.

B. Documenting the Exemption Determination

Using the 212(a)(3)(B) Exemption Worksheet (revised August 10, 2012), adjudicators will document exemption determinations as follows:

- Determine individual threshold eligibility;
- Describe the applicant's associations or activities with the group, noting any involvement in violence or other activities of concern;
- In Section IV, check the "Group Based Exemption" box and enter "OLF"; and
- In Section V, indicate whether the adjudicator recommends granting or denying the exemption.

Each Division will instruct its adjudicators on the requisite levels of review.

C. Record-Keeping Requirements

USCIS will maintain records on the number of cases considered under the OLF exemption and the cases' outcomes, and statistics will be consolidated on a quarterly basis, at a minimum. These statistics will be used to provide information to the interagency and stakeholders, and to inform the content of the required annual report to Congress.

D. Effect of Exemption on Future Adjudications

An exemption determination made under this Exercise of Authority can inform but shall not control a decision regarding any subsequent benefit or protection application.

E. Processing or Continued Hold of Certain Cases

If a case involving an applicant or beneficiary considered under the OLF exemption does not satisfy all requirements for consideration of the exemption, including the existing or pending benefit requirements and threshold requirements, and does not meet the requirements of the hold policy, the requested benefit should be denied. The applicant should be issued a Notice to Appear (NTA) in appropriate cases after review in accordance with standard operating

⁶ A spouse or child is inadmissible under INA section 212(a)(3)(B)(i)(IX), 8 U.S.C. § 1182(a)(3)(B)(i)(IX), if the related alien is inadmissible under INA section 212(a)(3)(B), 8 U.S.C. § 1182(a)(3)(B), for actions occurring within the last five years, unless the spouse or child qualifies for one of two statutory exceptions. A spouse or child is not inadmissible under INA section 212(a)(3)(B)(i)(IX) if: (1) he or she did not know or should not reasonably have known of the TRIG activity; or, (2) an adjudicator has reasonable grounds to believe that the spouse or child has renounced the TRIG activity. INA section 212(a)(3)(B)(ii), 8 U.S.C. § 1182(a)(3)(B)(ii). If the activity of the related alien may be exempted, USCIS may also consider an exemption for the spouse or child, even if the related alien is not also seeking admission or a benefit from USCIS.

procedures, including USCIS's NTA policy. Newly filed cases involving associations or activities with the OLF should be denied as ineligible for an exemption, unless after consultation with the TRIG Working Group per component guidance, it is determined that the case may be eligible for a future exercise of the Secretary's exemption authority. Cases for which such a determination is made should be placed on hold.

If a case does meet the threshold requirements but an exemption is denied in the totality of the circumstances, the application should be denied (or, if pertaining to an asylum application, referred as appropriate) after appropriate review in accordance with the above procedures.

If it is determined that the case does not meet the threshold requirements listed above, but otherwise meets the criteria enumerated under the current hold policy, the application should continue to remain on hold pending future exercises of the Secretary's discretionary exemption authority. This includes cases being held under the current hold policy involving applicants who do not qualify for this exercise of the exemption authority.

Use

This PM is intended solely for the guidance of USCIS personnel in the performance of their official duties. It is not intended to, does not, and may not be relied upon to create any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law or by any individual or other party in removal proceedings, in litigation with the United States, or in any other form or manner.

Contact Information

Questions should be directed through the component chain of command to the component USCIS TRIG Working Group point of contact.

Attachment

Exercise of Authority under Section 212(d)(3)(B)(i) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (OLF)