

VISITS TO SIBERIA BY AMERICAN ESKIMOS

Soviet memorandum dated at Washington February 7, 1938; exchange of notes at Washington March 26 and April 18, 1938

Entered into force April 18, 1938

*Terminated May 29, 1948*¹

Department of State files

The Soviet Embassy to the Department of State

MEMORANDUM

According to information at the disposal of this Embassy every year during the summer months various settlements of the Chukotsk National Region of the U.S.S.R. (Wellen, Dezhnev, Chaplino, Naukan and others) are visited by American Eskimos in groups of 25 to 35 men who come by motorboat from St. Lawrence Island and Little Diomed Island, territories of the United States, with the purpose of meeting their relatives, citizens of the U.S.S.R.

In addition to gifts for their relatives the visitors bring for sale seal and walrus skins, sable furs, raw hides and other products of their craft. They exchange these products in Soviet trading posts for different consumer goods (flour, sugar, tobacco, underclothing, etc.). For instance, American Eskimos who came from Little Diomed Island to Cape Dezhnev in the summer of 1937 sold their furs and raw skins for the sum of 2300 rubles and acquired consumer goods to approximately the same amount.

In view of the foregoing and taking into consideration the fact that until the present time the arrivals of American Eskimos on Soviet territory have not been legalized by due procedure, the Government of the U.S.S.R. intends to introduce the following simplified procedure for temporary stay on Soviet territory of American Eskimos residing on the above-mentioned islands of the Bering Straits, territory of the United States of America, provided that these Eskimos carry certificates issued by local United States authorities which certify their nationality, occupation and place of permanent residence:

1. The entrance of American Eskimos into the territory of the U.S.S.R. shall be permitted under condition of possession of group lists or individual certificates issued by local United States authorities. These certificates (or

¹ Pursuant to notice of termination given by the U.S.S.R. May 29, 1948.

lists) shall be presented for registration at the frontier guard station nearest to the point of entrance. At places without frontier guards the registration of Eskimos arriving from the United States shall be performed by the local Soviets.

2. The registration of the certificates (or lists) shall give the American Eskimos the right of stay on Soviet territory within a definite limit not to exceed three months, as well as the right of exit after the expiration of the permit and of free movement along the coast of the Chukotsk Peninsula and on the adjacent Soviet islands.

3. The number of American Eskimos arriving at different points in the Chukotsk National Region shall tentatively not exceed 100 persons during one year.

4. American Eskimos arriving on Soviet territory to visit their relatives shall be permitted to bring them as personal gifts walrus, seal and other skins and other products of their craft. These gifts shall enter in non-commercial quantities, the limits of such quantities to be fixed at the discretion of the local authorities.

Skins, furs and raw hides entering in commercial quantities shall be brought to the nearest Soviet trading station to be exchanged for different consumer goods which in these cases the trading station shall sell to the native Soviet citizens for exchange with skins and furs. The prices for this exchange of goods shall be fixed by mutual agreement of those trading.

5. The following goods shall not be permitted to be imported into the territory of the U.S.S.R.:

- a) firearms of all kinds including hunting rifles in personal possession
- b) narcotics
- c) Soviet currency
- d) printed matter
- e) liquor and wines
- f) objects of religious worship (with the exception of those in the personal use of the visitors)

6. The following goods shall not be permitted to be exported from the territory of the U.S.S.R.:

- a) firearms including hunting rifles
- b) Soviet and foreign currency (with the exception of those amounts of foreign currency which are brought by the American Eskimos and registered by them with the local authorities of the nearest settlement)
- c) valuable furs (with the exception of a reasonable quantity found to be in the personal use of the visitors and received by them as gifts from their relatives, Soviet citizens. These quantities are to be established by the local authorities).

February 7, 1938

EXCHANGE OF NOTES

The Secretary of State to the Soviet Ambassador

The Secretary of State presents his compliments to His Excellency the Ambassador of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and has the honor to refer to the memorandum dated February 7, left at the Department by the Ambassador, with respect to the desire of the Soviet Government to establish a certain procedure governing the visits to the Siberian mainland of American Eskimos residing on St. Lawrence Island and Little Diomedé Island.

The contents of this memorandum have been brought to the attention of the competent authorities of this Government, who have expressed themselves as being in accord with the desire of the Soviet Government to regularize the temporary visits of American Eskimos to Siberia and with the procedure which has been suggested by the Ambassador with a view to achieving this end.

The Eskimos residing on St. Lawrence and Little Diomedé Islands in Bering Strait are quite isolated from contact with Eskimos and whites residing on the mainland of Alaska. The only representatives of the United States Government on these two islands are teachers and a nurse employed by the Office of Indian Affairs of the Department of the Interior.

The teachers in charge of the American Indian Service schools on St. Lawrence Island and on Little Diomedé Island will be instructed to prepare and to issue to such Eskimos under their jurisdiction as may wish to make temporary visits to Siberia during the summer months, group lists or individual certificates setting forth their names, occupations, and places of permanent residence. They also will be instructed to advise the Eskimos to take these documents with them when they visit Siberia and to present them to the Soviet authorities upon demand.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington

March 26, 1938

The Soviet Ambassador to the Secretary of State

The Ambassador of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics presents his compliments to the Secretary of State and has the honor to acknowledge receipt of his note dated March 26th stating that the contents of the memorandum of February 7 left at the Department by the Ambassador, with respect to the desire of the Soviet Government to establish a certain procedure governing the visits to the Siberian mainland of American Eskimos residing on St. Lawrence Island and Little Diomedé Island, have been brought to the attention of the competent authorities of the United States Government.

It has been noted by the Ambassador that the United States authorities have expressed themselves as being in accord with the desire of the Soviet Government to regularize the temporary visits of the American Eskimos to Siberia and with the procedure which has been suggested by the Ambassador with a view to achieving this end.

THE AMBASSADOR OF THE
UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS
Washington, D.C.

April 18, 1938