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Swiss Embassy news: Biometric passports

The following article provided by the Swiss Embassy in Wellington addresses two key questions related to the new biometric passports:

- **Why a biometric passport was introduced**
- **Why you must come in person to the Embassy to get a new passport**

As many old, non-biometric passports expire and many questions pop up, the Embassy would like to explain why in 2010 a biometric Swiss passport was introduced and why Swiss citizens must come in person to the Embassy to get their new biometric passport. The Embassy acknowledges that the introduction of biometric passports has increased the time, cost and effort for many Swiss citizens living abroad to renew or newly establish their passports. This is particularly true for those citizens living in remote areas.

WHY A BIOMETRIC PASSPORT?

The introduction of biometric passports needs to be seen in the wider context of worldwide efforts to increase security and identification procedures in international travel after 9/11. In fact, many western countries nowadays have biometric passports. The introduction of biometric passports form part of the obligations Switzerland has as a member of the Schengen Association Agreement.

In Switzerland, the introduction of biometric passports was proposed by the Federal Council and approved by Parliament in 2008. The decision was subsequently challenged by a referendum. On 19 May 2009, the Swiss population approved the introduction of biometric passports. The decision – although far from being uncontroversial – was part of the democratic decision making process and backed by the majority of the Swiss population.

WHY DO I NEED TO TRAVEL TO GET MY BIOMETRIC PASSPORT?

For a biometric passport, the Embassy needs your biometrics, i.e. your photo, your fingerprints and your signature. The Embassy can only be assured of your identity if you come in person. This is also why the Embassy asks you to bring along proof of identity such as your old passport, identity card or a valid foreign identity document.

To get a new passport, you must apply to the Swiss Embassy in Wellington. However, you can request **via the Embassy** that your biometrics (photo, fingerprints, signature) are recorded at another Swiss representation or at a passport office in Switzerland. For example, if you travel to Sydney, you can request to have your biometrics recorded at the Consulate-General in Sydney. Or if you travel to Switzerland, you can request to have your biometrics recorded at a passport office of your choice. Even if you want to have your biometrics recorded at another Swiss representation or at a passport office in Switzerland, you still **must** apply for a new passport through the Swiss Embassy in Wellington.

Once your application for a new passport is filed and once your biometrics are recorded, it takes up to 12 working weeks for the passport to be produced in Switzerland. If you have changed your name through marriage or otherwise, you must register this with the Swiss Embassy in Wellington **before** you apply for your new passport.

Your new passport will be sent directly to you if your old passport was cancelled when your biometrics were recorded. If your old passport has not been cancelled, your new passport will be sent to the Swiss Embassy in Wellington. You can then either mail or bring your old passport to the Embassy to get it cancelled, and your new passport will be sent back to you or given to you in person.

It is not possible to extend the validity of a non-biometric passport. Electronic passports, such as the new New Zealand passport, do not contain biometric data. This is why New Zealanders do not have to have their fingerprints or a biometric photo taken to get a new passport.

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