



United States Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20520

September 29, 2004

Jane Lubchenco
President
International Council for Science
51, boulevard de Montmorency
75016 Paris, France

Dear Jane,

I greatly appreciated receiving your letter of June 10, 2004 concerning current U.S. visa policies and procedures *with* regard to scientists and engineers. This issue has been noted by others and is clearly a major topic of discussion throughout the international scientific community. The points you make are representative of the general concern over the well-being of the global scientific enterprise and the need to ensure open environments for productive scientific inquiry.

Needless to say, all of us are concerned about border security. We remain committed to visa policies and procedures that are effectively balanced to ensure a high degree of security for the United States, while fostering the historically open and welcoming environment for the exchange of scholars and information that has been so enormously productive for our country. Embracing international cooperation in scientific education and research has been an admired hallmark of the U.S. scientific community for many decades. Loss of this open and engaging environment promoting scientific inquiry would be seriously detrimental for the United States in ways that are both obvious and hidden.

The Department of State has worked with other agencies throughout the U.S. government to initiate changes in visa policies and procedures designed to address your concerns. We are working diligently with these other agencies to improve procedures that simultaneously optimize security and promote the open educational and research environments needed by the scientific communities.

Although significant progress has been made over the last eighteen months, three recent advances are especially encouraging.

First, changes in interagency procedures for handling special science and technology clearance cases should allow nearly all of them to clear in 30 days or less. The initial impact of these changes has been the clearance of hundreds of previously pending visa applications.

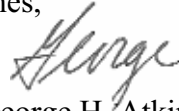
Second, we and other U.S. government agencies are considering extending the validity period for a Visa Mantis clearance to reflect the length of specific educational and research programs. These changes would facilitate the foreign valid visas who are studying or working in the United States.

Third, we and other U.S. government agencies are reviewing procedures that would facilitate the travel of scientific visitors attending conferences. The State Department has already instructed Embassies and Consulates to provide priority visa interview appointments to applicants for student and exchange visitor visas, which helps facilitate their travel.

All of these changes result from extensive discussion and analysis throughout the U.S. government focused on how to optimize safety and security without unduly restricting open scientific exchange of people and information. We will continue to give full consideration to the important priorities of the science and engineering communities in decisions concerning visa policies and procedures.

Personally, I am most appreciative of the attention you and your colleagues in the International Council for Science have given these issues and of the time you have taken to contact me. I commend the work ICSU is doing to further the exchange and creation of new knowledge. Your advice and support on behalf of the scientific and educational communities is of significant value to me and is obviously an important, and often critical, element in an ongoing dialogue defining what we can jointly accomplish. I look forward to our continuing dialogue. Please do not hesitate to continue to apprise me of your views and concerns.

Best wishes,



George H. Atkinson
Science and Technology Adviser
to the Secretary
U.S. Department of State