

# U.S.: Havana 'roadblocks' behind visa holdup

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WASHINGTON --

The State Department on Wednesday released new details of how it claims Cuba has been preventing the U.S. diplomatic mission in Havana from meeting a requirement that Washington issue 20,000 visas to Cubans each year.

Cuba on Tuesday accused the Bush administration of deliberately handing out fewer visas to cause instability on the island.

It said the State Department had issued fewer than 11,000 visas in the nine months ending June 30, well short of the 20,000 quota agreed in a bilateral 1994 migration accord.

Cuban authorities have retained 28 shipping containers with supplies for the U.S. diplomatic mission in Havana for a year, State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said, and denied visas to U.S. personnel who need to go to Havana to maintain technical systems.

U.S. personnel who need to go to the mission to carry out electrical repairs also have been waiting for visas for over a year, another State Department official said.

Cuba also has refused to allow the mission to replace local staff members who have left or retired.

In a separate statement, the U.S. Interests Section said it needed to hire 47 staff members.

"Of course we want to meet our obligations under this accord, but, frankly, we've been prevented from meeting those obligations by the multiple roadblocks that I've listed here," McCormack said.