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## Office of Inspector General United States Department of State

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ISP-I-19-26

Office of Inspections

August 2019

# Inspection of Embassy Tirana, Albania

BUREAU OF EUROPEAN AND EURASIAN AFFAIRS

UNCLASSIFIED



# HIGHLIGHTS

Office of Inspector General  
United States Department of State

ISP-I-19-26

## What OIG Inspected

OIG conducted a targeted inspection of the executive direction, foreign assistance coordination, consular services, resource management, and information management of Embassy Tirana.

## What OIG Recommends

OIG made 10 recommendations: 9 to Embassy Tirana and 1 to the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations.

In its comments on the draft report, the Department concurred with all 10 recommendations. OIG considers all 10 recommendations resolved. The Department's response to each recommendation, and OIG's reply, can be found in the Recommendations section of this report. The Department's formal written responses are reprinted in their entirety in Appendix B.

August 2019

OFFICE OF INSPECTIONS

BUREAU OF EUROPEAN AND EURASIAN AFFAIRS

## Inspection of Embassy Tirana, Albania

## What OIG Found

- Embassy Tirana's Chargé d'Affaires and acting Deputy Chief of Mission formed a collaborative team committed to developing a positive working atmosphere for the embassy. However, they did not adjust their working relationship and division of labor to better share policy management responsibilities when their roles became long-term rather than temporary.
- Embassy section and agency heads reported that interagency collaboration and cooperation were excellent.
- Foreign assistance activities were well aligned with priority policy goals, and the embassy was taking steps to strengthen coordination and manage the effect of a U.S. Agency for International Development drawdown in Albania.
- The Consular Section's strong teamwork allowed it to maintain high performance despite staff shortages, but some improvements were needed to the section's accessibility, line-of-sight control, and signage.
- The embassy lacked seismic and safety mitigation plans for some chancery and residential properties.

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## CONTEXT

Albania is a Muslim-majority country with a population of just over 3 million. The country is working to overcome legacy challenges from a difficult history but is eager to be part of a free and prosperous Europe. Albania declared its independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1912, only to be conquered by Italy in 1939 and occupied by Germany in 1943. Communist partisans took over the country in 1944, allying Albania first with the Soviet Union (until 1960), and then with China (to 1978). In the early 1990s, Albania ended 46 years of isolated communist rule and established a multiparty democracy.

Albania has made progress in its democratic and economic development over the past 30 years. In April 2009, it joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and in June 2014, it



became a candidate to join the European Union. Despite this progress, successive governments have struggled to address high unemployment, widespread corruption, dilapidated infrastructure, powerful organized crime networks, and fractious domestic politics. Albania remains one of the poorest countries in Europe.

Albania's populace holds the United States in high esteem. According to a 2018 Gallup study, Albania's approval rating of 72 percent for U.S. leadership is the second highest in the world.

**Figure 1:** Map of Albania. (CIA World Factbook)

The top U.S. foreign policy goals in Albania, as described in Embassy Tirana's 2018 Integrated Country Strategy (ICS), are:

- To help the country implement rule-of-law reforms and curtail corruption and organized crime.
- To strengthen Albania's capacity as a NATO partner.
- To help Albania strengthen its democratic institutions and deepen economic reforms.

U.S. foreign assistance to Albania (\$12.8 million in FY 2018) is split between democracy and good governance programs, which receive about 60 percent of the funds, and peace and security activities, which receive the remaining 40 percent.

At the time of the inspection, Embassy Tirana had 80 U.S. employees, including 10 eligible family members. The embassy also had 284 locally employed (LE) staff members. Of the 80 U.S. employees, 53 worked for the Department of State (Department), and 27 worked for other

Government agencies, which included the Departments of Defense and Justice and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). In addition, the Peace Corps had approximately 70 volunteers in Albania. The embassy was managing a significant transition of programs and personnel as USAID Albania was in the process of phasing out most of its programs by December 2019.

OIG conducted the inspection of Embassy Tirana consistent with Section 209 of the Foreign Service Act of 1980.<sup>1</sup> Using its risk-based approach to inspections, OIG limited the scope of this inspection to executive direction, foreign assistance coordination, consular services, resource management, and information management. A companion classified inspection report discusses the embassy's security program and issues affecting the safety of mission personnel and facilities.

## **EXECUTIVE DIRECTION**

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OIG assessed Embassy Tirana's leadership on the basis of interviews, staff questionnaires, and OIG's review of documents and observations of meetings and activities during the course of the on-site portion of the inspection.

### **Tone at the Top and Standards of Conduct**

At the time of the inspection, the embassy had been without an ambassador for approximately 8 months, and there was no ambassador-designate. The Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM), a career Foreign Service officer, arrived in August 2018 and assumed the duties of Chargé d'Affaires (Chargé) one month later. She previously served as the Deputy Director of the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs' Office of Policy and Global Issues. The posting to Embassy Tirana was her first in the Balkans and her first as a DCM, now Chargé. The acting DCM, who arrived at the embassy as the head of the Consular Section in June 2016, moved into his new position when the Chargé assumed her responsibilities.

#### ***Engaged Chargé and Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Working to Adjust to Current Roles***

American and LE staff members described the Chargé and the acting DCM as engaged, hard-working, and approachable. Although neither received formal training for their current positions, they formed a collaborative Front Office team consistent with the Department's leadership principles outlined in 3 Foreign Affairs Manual (FAM) 1214. Both were committed to developing a positive working atmosphere in the embassy and ensuring the staff maintained a reasonable work-life balance. For example, they encouraged staff to depart the office on time and hosted a monthly "all-hands" coffee where they made remarks, delivered awards, and recognized employee achievements.

OIG found, however, that the Chargé and the acting DCM did not adjust their working relationship and division of labor to reflect roles that had become long-term rather than

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A.

temporary. For example, the acting DCM did not represent the embassy in any meetings with senior Government of Albania officials during the roughly 8 months he had served in the role. This limited his command of the policy agenda while also creating an imbalance in Front Office workload management regarding external activities. Given Embassy Tirana's significant access and level of engagement in Albania, the Chargé's busy external schedule, including meetings with host government officials and international representatives, made her less available to attend regular meetings with section chiefs and to conduct other internal embassy business. Staff members uniformly told OIG they found the acting DCM to be readily accessible, both on short notice and through scheduled one-on-one meetings. However, the acting DCM told OIG he did not always feel sufficiently informed on policy issues, hindering his decision-making ability. OIG encouraged the Chargé to delegate more external meetings and events to the acting DCM or others as appropriate. This not only would free the Chargé to devote more time to internal embassy coordination and decision-making, but also better prepare the acting DCM to handle the full range of policy issues and to assume the Chargé's duties when needed.

### ***Front Office Oversaw a Collaborative Country Team***

Embassy section and agency heads told OIG inter-agency collaboration and cooperation was excellent. For example, during the anniversary of Albania's entry into NATO, which occurred during OIG's visit, the Defense Attaché Office, Public Diplomacy Section, and Political-Economic Section, supported by the Front Office, worked with the Albanian Government on a series of commemorative events. These included a Defense Attaché ceremony for the donation of U.S. military equipment to Albania, where the Public Diplomacy Section coordinated publicity and photos, and a joint talk by the Chargé and Albania's Minister of Defense at a local high school to highlight NATO and Albania's role in the alliance. Agency heads agreed the Chargé and the acting DCM supported their goals and needs and routinely invited them to participate in, or provide talking points for, meetings with high-level Albanian officials.

### **Equal Employment Opportunity Program**

OIG found the embassy's Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) program met the requirements of 3 FAM 1514.2, and that the Front Office regularly demonstrated its commitment to ethical and EEO principles. For example, each year the Front Office dedicated one of the embassy's all American staff bi-weekly meetings to EEO topics and made attendance mandatory.

Additionally, the embassy presented EEO information to all LE staff members in a series of town hall sessions conducted in both English and Albanian. American staff described the embassy's EEO environment as good, and there had been no related cases at the embassy in the year preceding the inspection.

The acting DCM, who was the embassy's EEO counselor while serving as Consular Section chief, retained that responsibility in his current role. Given that his broad supervisory responsibilities as acting DCM could limit his capacity to be seen as a neutral party in EEO situations, OIG

advised him, and he agreed, to transfer those responsibilities to a different officer as soon as the Department lifts its temporary suspension of new EEO counselor training.<sup>2</sup>

## **Execution of Foreign Policy Goals and Objectives**

The embassy developed its 2018-2021 ICS under the former Ambassador before the Chargé's arrival, with consultation and input from all sections and agencies, and submitted it to the Department on August 7, 2018. American and LE staff members told OIG that both the former Ambassador and the Chargé clearly communicated the embassy's ICS priorities at country team and all-American meetings, as well as at other embassy events. OIG observed that both American and LE staff were fully aware of the embassy's ICS goals. The embassy coordinated progress toward ICS goals through a system of working groups staffed by Department and other agency officers.

The Chargé was engaged extensively with Albanian Government officials and other ambassadors and international officials. She had frequent and regular meetings with the President, Prime Minister, and other cabinet members and with political party leaders in order to advance ICS objectives. For example, when opponents of justice reform attempted to derail a key anti-corruption initiative, the Chargé met with the Minister of Justice to discuss how best to overcome this opposition. Working together, they gave highly publicized remarks in support of the initiative, which subsequently passed, helping fulfill the embassy's top ICS goal of assisting Albania to effectively implement key rule of law reforms. On another occasion, when it appeared Albania would miss its NATO spending target, the Chargé's outreach to the Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Minister of Finance helped hold Albania to its NATO spending commitment, supporting the ICS goal of making Albania a stronger NATO ally and advancing regional security.

## **Adherence to Internal Controls**

The Chargé certified and submitted the 2018 Annual Chief of Mission Management Control Statement of Assurance on September 27, 2018, in accordance with 2 FAM 024. The Management Officer coordinated the embassy's internal control review process and consulted with section heads for their input and with the Chargé for final review, in accordance with 2 FAM 022.7. The embassy's Statement of Assurance identified no material weaknesses or significant deficiencies. However, during the inspection, OIG found some deficiencies in consular services, general services, facility management, and human resources, as described in the Resource Management section of this report.

OIG found the Chargé carried out regular reviews of nonimmigrant visa adjudications, as required by 9 FAM 403.12-2b. In addition, OIG's review of the embassy's gift registry for FY 2018 and FY 2019 until the time of the inspection found no anomalies or prohibited practices.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Cable 19 STATE 21340, "Hold On Nomination Submissions for EEO Counselors" dated March 8, 2019, announced a temporary suspension of basic EEO counselor training through June 30, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> 2 FAM 964.

## Security and Emergency Planning

OIG found the Chargé and the acting DCM conducted their security responsibilities in accordance with 12 Foreign Affairs Handbook (FAH)-1 H-721. They underscored the importance of embassy security in town halls, all-American and country team meetings, and embassy notices. The Chargé met weekly with the Regional Security Officer, and she or the acting DCM chaired several meetings of the Emergency Action Committee, which is responsible for embassy emergency preparedness. The Chargé and the acting DCM participated in all security drills and strongly encouraged staff to participate in radio checks, requiring the Front Office be notified of those who did not take part so they could follow up with the employees. However, there are seismic safety concerns with some embassy buildings and residences, as discussed in the Resource Management section of this report. The related classified inspection report discusses the embassy's security and emergency preparedness programs in more detail.

## Developing and Mentoring Foreign Service Professionals

Embassy Tirana had four First- and Second-Tour (FAST) employees at the time of the inspection. The Chargé, while briefly in the DCM position when she first arrived, implemented a FAST employee development program, hosting a lunch and speaking at a Balkans-wide digital videoconference for FAST employees. The acting DCM continued the program, holding one-on-one meetings with all participants and discussing issues ranging from bidding to employee evaluation report writing to diplomatic protocol. At the time of the inspection, the acting DCM was in the process of organizing a formal schedule of training activities for participants to further strengthen the program.

## FOREIGN ASSISTANCE

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Embassy Tirana foreign assistance activities were well-aligned with goals described in the embassy's ICS.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, in FY 2018, approximately \$7.7 million in democracy, human rights, and governance foreign assistance funding supported the embassy's rule of law efforts, while approximately \$5 million in peace and security assistance supported efforts to strengthen NATO partner capacity.

At the time of the inspection, the embassy was attempting to strengthen coordination of foreign assistance implementation during a period of significant program and personnel transition. Specifically, USAID intended to close most of its Albania programs by the end of 2019. In addition, the Department of Justice offices responsible for the embassy's principal rule

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<sup>4</sup> The Departments of State, Justice, and Defense, as well as USAID, administer Embassy Tirana's foreign assistance funds. The Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs provided funding (\$5.3 million in FY 2018) for two Department of Justice-administered programs: the International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program and the Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance, and Training program. The Department of State also funded and administered \$2.7 million in FY 2018 for democracy and public diplomacy, conventional weapons destruction, and export control programs. The Department of Defense administered \$897,000 in International Military Education and Training funds in FY 2018. Finally, USAID administered \$3.9 million in FY 2018 for justice reform and community development programs.



of law programs were transitioning to new leadership, with two long-tenured senior officials representing significant institutional memory scheduled to depart in 2019. However, not all program and personnel transitions involved drawdowns or departures. In 2018, the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) restored staffing to a two-person office after a 15-month gap. As described below, the embassy took steps to manage these transitions through two coordination mechanisms, but OIG found that room for improvement remained.

### ***Embassy Took Steps to Improve Coordination During Period of Transition***

The embassy took two steps to improve its coordination of foreign assistance implementation in Albania. First, in December 2018, it created a Foreign Assistance Coordination Group that met quarterly under the Chargé's leadership. Second, shortly before the inspection, the Political-Economic Section hired an Expanded Professional Associate<sup>5</sup> as Assistance Coordinator to take over duties previously handled by the Economic-Commercial Officer and USAID. The new coordination group met twice before the on-site portion of this inspection, but some attendees told OIG the initial meetings left them confused about tasks and direction. OIG suggested to the Chargé, and she agreed, that she empower the Assistance Coordinator to manage future meetings to ensure they have agendas with clear decision points and that resulting action items are tracked. The Chargé also agreed with an OIG suggestion to use the coordination group to ensure that the newly reconstituted INL Tirana office's programs, in particular its rule of law program activity, effectively support embassy goals without duplicating or undermining the existing Justice Department-administered programs.

### ***Front Office Worked with Washington to Resolve Long-Standing Interagency Disagreement***

The embassy Front Office successfully resolved a lingering dispute affecting a significant security assistance program.<sup>6</sup> When months of disagreement at the working level threatened successful implementation of a new U.S.-funded border technology software program, the Front Office effectively brokered an agreement between the Department and the Department of Justice on how best to integrate the new software with an earlier Justice-provided system already being used by the Albanian Government. The embassy accomplished this, in part, by engaging Washington officials at the deputy assistant secretary level and forging agreement on how to address the procedural and technical issues that had been blocking integration. As a result of Front Office intervention and weekly embassy coordination meetings chaired by the acting DCM, the software integration process was able to move forward.

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<sup>5</sup> The Expanded Professional Associate Program provides eligible family members with employment opportunities in key positions abroad. The program differs from other family member employment opportunities in that it offers responsibilities similar to Foreign Service entry-level positions.

<sup>6</sup> The embassy sought to implement the Personal Identification Secure Comparison and Evaluation System, which provides partner countries with border security assistance to limit terrorist mobility. The Department's Bureau of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism manages the system's installation. Previously, the Department of Justice had provided INL-funded software (Total Information Management System) to the Albanian State Police, which managed some of the same data. Integration of the two systems, which are not fully compatible, had been pending since 2017.

## CONSULAR OPERATIONS

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OIG reviewed Embassy Tirana's consular operations, including American citizen services, nonimmigrant and immigrant visas, training, management controls, communications and outreach, crisis preparedness, and consular facilities and workflow. OIG also assessed coordination between the embassy's Consular Section and other sections and agencies. The section's visa chief, a third-tour consular officer, assumed responsibility for consular operations when the Consular Section chief became acting DCM. The acting section chief demonstrated leadership in managing an increased nonimmigrant visa workload despite staffing gaps.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, nearly all consular personnel identified the section's teamwork and positive collaboration as its greatest strengths in helping to maintain high morale and productivity, traits that OIG observed during the inspection. OIG concluded that the embassy carried out its consular responsibilities in compliance with applicable law and Department guidance, with the exception of the issues detailed below.

### ***Consular Officers Did Not Have Line-of-Sight Control over Fraud Prevention Unit Staff***

Consular officers could not visually monitor the work of the Fraud Prevention Unit, a key internal control. The height of the three employees' modular work space exceeded the permissible maximum, making it impossible to monitor their activities without standing directly next to them. According to 7 FAH-1 H-282(15), Consular Section employees should have office or low-rise modular work space with partitions no higher than 42 inches to facilitate line-of-sight supervision. The lack of line-of-sight control of the Fraud Prevention Unit's work space increases the risk that malfeasance could occur without a manager's knowledge.

**Recommendation 1:** Embassy Tirana, in coordination with the Bureau of Consular Affairs, should adapt the work spaces of all Fraud Prevention Unit employees to allow for required line-of-sight supervision. (Action: Embassy Tirana, in coordination with CA)

### ***Embassy Lacked a Wheelchair-Accessible Interview Window***

The embassy did not have an interview window accessible to wheelchair-bound consular clients, as required by 7 FAH-1 H-282(23). Without an interview window low enough for persons using wheelchairs, clients would not have equal access to this Federal facility, making it difficult for both the client and the officer to conduct an interview.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> At the time of the inspection, only two of the section's four consular officer positions, and one of its two eligible family member positions, were filled.

<sup>8</sup> OIG also observed that the small nonimmigrant visa intake and interview area—measuring 8 by 18 feet, with six windows, including a privacy booth—limited the section's capacity to process nonimmigrant visa applicants. After applicants complete the intake process, they return to an outer waiting area unattached to the main consular building with number cards. They subsequently return in groups of 12 to stand at the back wall of the inner waiting area until an interviewing officer is available. The flow of applicants in and out of the small inner space is cumbersome and inefficient. In addition, the limited space means that each applicant's interview is fully audible to other applicants waiting their turn. While the Department has no requirements regarding minimum space for intake and interview areas, OIG is noting the issue because the embassy may have an opportunity to address these sub-optimal conditions when physical changes are made to accommodate this accessibility recommendation.

**Recommendation 2:** Embassy Tirana, in coordination with the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations and the Bureau of Consular Affairs, should provide a wheelchair-accessible interview window for consular clients as required by Department standards. (Action: Embassy Tirana, in coordination with OBO and CA)

### ***Embassy Lacked Sufficient Signage to Direct Consular Clients***

Embassy Tirana lacked adequate signage on public walkways and in the outer and inner consular waiting areas. Consular clients accessed the embassy's separate consular entrance from two opposite ends of a long public walkway. However, there was no signage at one of the walkway's two entrances. Moreover, the one directional sign along the walkway was difficult to read and was partially obstructed by tree foliage. In addition, there was no signage to direct applicants after they passed through security to the first waiting area, nor any signage above the cashier's window. Finally, the only signage in the inner consular waiting area were numbers marking the interview windows. Guidance in 7-FAH-1 H-282(12) and 7 FAH-1 H-263.8 calls for consular sections to have clear signs directing the public to the correct window or waiting area. Inadequate signage can lead to confusion among clients, increasing the time they spend in a section and slowing consular processing.

**Recommendation 3:** Embassy Tirana, in coordination with the Bureau of Consular Affairs, should post adequate signage for the embassy's public areas to assist and direct consular clients. (Action: Embassy Tirana, in coordination with CA)

## **RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

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OIG reviewed internal control systems in the general services, financial management, facility management, and human resources operations and found the Management Section generally implemented required processes and procedures in accordance with applicable laws and Department guidance, except as described below. Additionally, during the inspection, Embassy Tirana addressed some internal control deficiencies in financial management and facility management, which are also described below.

### **General Services**

#### ***Inadequate Internal Controls over Facility Management Expendable Supplies***

The embassy lacked adequate internal controls over the Facility Management Office's expendable supplies, such as maintenance materials and spare parts. For example, OIG found the General Services Office accepted supplies at the warehouse and delivered them to facility management staff at the embassy without first entering the items into the expendable supplies tracking system, as required by 14 FAM 414.1. This occurred because rapid delivery of supplies was prioritized over proper recording of items in the inventory. In addition, OIG found that the facility management staff kept supplies in their workshops rather than in a central supply room that is controlled by a designated clerk. According to guidance in 14 FAM 414.4(1-2), the

embassy must establish adequate inventory safeguards, controls, and procedures for its expendable property. According to 14 FAH-1 H-418.3, a supply room convenient to all offices is the most generally accepted method of dispersing small quantities of expendable supplies. Facility management staff members were aware of this issue and acknowledged they needed a central supply room to store and control expendable supplies. Failure to properly safeguard and account for expendable supplies left the embassy vulnerable to waste and theft.

**Recommendation 4:** Embassy Tirana should establish internal controls to safeguard and control the Facility Management Office's expendable supplies in accordance with Department standards. (Action: Embassy Tirana)

***Embassy Did Not Secure or Account for Leftover Construction Materials***

The embassy had not secured or accounted for construction materials, such as conduit, electrical cables, and wiring, left behind from recent construction projects. OIG found unsecured materials on both the embassy compound and at the U.S. Government-owned housing complex. Guidance in 4 FAH-1 H-313.1 requires that embassies properly secure and store all materials that can be used as improvised weapons, including, but not limited to, loose construction materials. In addition, 14 FAM 414.4(5)(a) requires that spare materials be treated as expendable property. The embassy was aware of these requirements but had not prioritized securing the materials and recording them in its expendable property inventory. The lack of property accountability and inventory controls increases the risk of waste and mismanagement. Moreover, failing to properly secure and store loose construction materials could also compromise employee safety.

**Recommendation 5:** Embassy Tirana should secure and account for all leftover construction materials in accordance with Department standards. (Action: Embassy Tirana)

**Facility Management**

***Embassy Did Not Perform Seismic Evaluations of Newly Leased Residences***

The embassy did not conduct seismic safety assessments of the 10 residential properties leased following the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations' (OBO) last residential seismic survey and assessment report, dated November 2017. Guidance in 15 FAM 252.6f requires posts in high risk seismic areas, such as Tirana, to evaluate the seismic safety of residential buildings by engaging the services of a local structural engineer and, as necessary, requesting the services of OBO's in-house professional engineering staff or its seismic consultants. In addition, posts must align their residential seismic assessment efforts with OBO's Natural Hazards Program standards, which state that in areas of high seismic activity, posts should try to minimize life and safety risks by seeking the "seismically best available" housing. Embassy Tirana's Management Section staff members did not realize they had to assume responsibility for performing seismic assessments for any buildings leased subsequent to OBO's November 2017

report. Leasing properties without seismic safety assessments poses significant life and safety risk to occupants.

**Recommendation 6:** Embassy Tirana, in coordination with the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations, should perform seismic evaluations of embassy residential properties in accordance with Department standards. (Action: Embassy Tirana, in coordination with OBO)

***Mitigation Plan Needed to Address Major Seismic Concerns at the Embassy Compound***

The November 2017 OBO seismic report rated several embassy compound buildings as seismically “poor” or “very poor.”<sup>9</sup> However, at the time of the inspection, the embassy had yet to prepare or implement a mitigation plan to address these concerns. Guidance in 15 FAM 312.6-2a(6) and OBO’s Natural Hazards Program objectives require embassies with facilities located in a seismic zone to contact OBO for guidance on measures the embassy can take to protect those facilities from seismic damage and to reduce risk to personnel. The embassy told OIG it contacted the Natural Hazards Program manager in January 2018 but was still waiting for guidance. Failure to mitigate seismic concerns poses significant life and safety risk to occupants.

**Recommendation 7:** The Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations, in coordination with Embassy Tirana, should provide a mitigation plan to address seismic concerns with at-risk embassy compound buildings. (Action: OBO, in coordination with Embassy Tirana)

***Embassy Needs Additional Safety Mitigation for Residential Community Swimming Pools***

Embassy Tirana did not mitigate life and safety risks at its leased residential compounds with community swimming pools. OIG found that embassy residences at four different housing complexes had community swimming pools without fences or other safeguards. The OBO swimming pool safety program states that even when pools are not under embassy control, and thus are not directly covered by the Department’s swimming pool safety standards, the embassy should advocate for appropriate safeguards with landlords or owner associations. The embassy issued a management notice on pool safety in 2018 and provided swimming pool safety guidance to all newly arriving staff but had yet to contact the landlords to pursue potential safety mitigation steps. Failure to mitigate vulnerabilities with swimming pools puts employee life and safety at risk.

**Recommendation 8:** Embassy Tirana should work with landlords to mitigate vulnerabilities with community swimming pools at its leased residential compounds. (Action: Embassy Tirana)

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<sup>9</sup> According to OBO’s Seismic Hazard Ratings table, buildings rated as “poor” could suffer major damage in a large earthquake, while buildings rated as “very poor” could suffer partial or total collapse.

### ***Unauthorized Use and Occupancy of Shipping Containers and Portable Structures***

The embassy used several shipping containers and non-permanent structures on the embassy compound and in the U.S. Government-owned residential complex as local guard facilities, driver and gardener break rooms, offices, and permanent storage space. The Department issued guidance in September 2018<sup>10</sup> stating that embassies cannot use shipping containers that do not conform to Department building codes, security standards, and fire codes standards and that containers not certified by OBO should be dismantled and removed. OBO's preliminary assessment to OIG, with which the embassy concurred, was that the embassy's containers were non-conforming and would need to be removed. Failure to dismantle and remove shipping containers and portable structures used as functional spaces creates possible life and safety issues for embassy employees.

**Recommendation 9:** Embassy Tirana should dismantle and remove its shipping containers and portable structures in accordance with Department requirements. (Action: Embassy Tirana)

### ***Embassy Addressed Other Deficiencies During Course of Inspection***

OIG identified two other deficiencies in the Facility Management Office, which the embassy corrected during the inspection. Therefore, OIG did not make recommendations to address these issues. Specifically, the embassy:

- Added the required Department of State Acquisition Regulations and Federal Acquisition Regulations clauses to its statement of work template for its embassy-managed construction projects, and revised applicable current contracts, as required by cable 14 STATE 46762.<sup>11</sup>
- Initiated the process for a preventive maintenance contract for its generators using building maintenance expense funds, in accordance with 15 FAM 623a-b.

## **Financial Management**

OIG identified one internal control deficiency in the Financial Management Office, which the embassy corrected during the inspection. Specifically, the embassy began holding periodic meetings of its International Cooperative Administrative Support Services<sup>12</sup> council and budget committee, as outlined in 6 FAH-5 H-222.3-3c and 6 FAH-5 H-222.4-3b. As a result, OIG did not make a recommendation to address this issue.

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<sup>10</sup> Cable 18 STATE 98976, "Shipping Containers And Portable Structure Use And Occupancy Requirement," September 27, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Cable 14 STATE 46762, "Oversight of Post Contractor Safety and Health Activities," April 22, 2014.

<sup>12</sup> The International Cooperative Administrative Support Services, established in 1997, is the principal means by which U.S. Government agencies share the cost of common administrative support services at more than 250 diplomatic and consular posts overseas.

## Human Resources

### *Local Compensation Plan Did Not Comply With Albanian Labor Law*

Embassy Tirana's local compensation plan did not comply with Albanian labor law. Specifically, OIG found that since 2015, local labor laws required the payment of a Sunday differential.<sup>13</sup> However, the embassy, did not update its local compensation plan accordingly, depriving local staff of this benefit. Guidance in 3 FAH-2 H-132.3a(1) requires embassies to review local compensation plans at least annually to ensure they are current. In addition, 3 FAH-2 H-132.4a calls for the human resources officer to stay abreast of salary developments within the host country and initiate action, when appropriate. The embassy was aware of this change in law but had not updated its compensation plan due to competing priorities of the staff member who was serving as both the Human Resources Officer and the Financial Management Officer. An outdated local compensation plan can deny LE staff the benefits they are entitled to have.

**Recommendation 10:** Embassy Tirana, in coordination with the Bureau of Human Resources, should update its local compensation plan to reflect current Government of Albania labor law. (Action: Embassy Tirana, in coordination with DGHR)

### *Embassy Working to Resolve Medical Insurance Issues Affecting Locally Employed Staff*

The embassy's \$1.7 million medical insurance contract for its LE staff, awarded in 2016 for coverage through April 2021, prompted consistent complaints from the LE staff. These included denial of benefits, long delays in adjudicating complex claims, and a lack of transparency in applying reasonable and customary costs to the services received by LE staff members and their families. OIG found the problems persisted despite the efforts of the Contracting Officer, the Contracting Officer's Representative, and the embassy's Human Resources Office to work with the contractor to improve its customer service and its adherence to the contract terms. The embassy stated its concerns in the last contract performance assessment, completed in February 2019, and told OIG it was exploring the possibility of rebidding the contract. The embassy attempted to participate in the Office of Overseas Employment's Global Medical Coverage program<sup>14</sup> but did not meet the criteria for the plan, which prioritizes posts with contracts expiring within 9 to 12 months. OIG advised the embassy to work with both the Department's Office of the Procurement Executive and the Office of Overseas Employment to explore all other options for insurance for LE staff.

## INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

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OIG reviewed the embassy's classified, unclassified, and dedicated internet network operations; physical protection of information technology (IT) assets; emergency communication preparedness; radio and telephone programs; and mail and pouch services. OIG determined

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<sup>13</sup> Article 87 of the Albanian Labor Code, amended in December 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Global Medical Coverage is a Bureau of Human Resources Office of Overseas Employment program that creates a global standard for medical benefits and sets minimum reimbursement levels.



that the information management programs and services met the day-to-day computing and communications needs of the embassy. The section was 1 of 10 information management sections globally that volunteered to pilot new cloud-based Department technology that would allow users to access email and files from any location. The section successfully trained users how to use the new software to access, collaborate, and share information. In response to suggestions made by OIG, the section corrected several minor noncompliance issues in IT contingency planning and emergency preparedness, as well as two more significant issues discussed below.

### ***Improperly Managed Network User Groups Created Security Risk***

OIG's review of the embassy's network user group data<sup>15</sup> found that because of a Department error, Embassy Tirana was mistakenly given unauthorized access to the entire European regional network group. While OIG found no evidence that inappropriate access occurred, the elevated access privilege meant embassy users could have accessed European-wide information in shared folders outside their areas of responsibility. Guidance in 12 FAH-10 H-112.5-2(1) and 12 FAH-10 H-112.1.1a(2-3) stipulates that users should only have access to the files, programs, and data necessary for them to perform their official duties. The discrepancy occurred because an updated version of the Department's system management software<sup>16</sup> resulted in erroneous group membership assignments. Failure to accurately maintain appropriate compartmentalization of membership groups increases the risk of a security breach, especially if employees in a group are given higher administrative privileges than are necessary to do their jobs. During the inspection, the Information Management Officer worked with the Department to resolve the embassy's issue. The Department also took steps to address the issue globally. As a result, OIG did not make a recommendation to address this issue.

### ***Embassy Did Not Follow Disposition Procedures for Records of Former Ambassadors***

The embassy did not dispose of the records and files of former ambassadors in accordance with Department standards. Specifically, OIG found records and digital media belonging to two former ambassadors that should have been retired and returned to Washington. Guidance in 5 FAM 414.5-414.8 requires the embassy to preserve documentary materials or regularly dispose of them according to Department guidance and schedules. The responsible embassy personnel were unclear about these requirements and did not prioritize this records management task. During the inspection, the embassy worked with the Department's Washington Records Center to retire the records in accordance with Department requirements. As a result, OIG did not make a recommendation to address this issue.

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<sup>15</sup> The Department uses a commercial software called Active Directory to authenticate and authorize network services. It tracks security-related attributes of all network user accounts and organizes those accounts in different user groups.

<sup>16</sup> This software, known as iPost, is the custom software application used by the Department to continuously monitor and report risk on its IT infrastructure.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

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OIG provided a draft of this report to Department stakeholders for their review and comment on the findings and recommendations. OIG issued the following recommendations to Embassy Tirana and the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations. The Department's complete responses can be found in Appendix B.

**Recommendation 1:** Embassy Tirana, in coordination with the Bureau of Consular Affairs, should adapt the work spaces of all Fraud Prevention Unit employees to allow for required line-of-sight supervision. (Action: Embassy Tirana, in coordination with CA)

**Management Response:** In its July 12, 2019, response, Embassy Tirana concurred with this recommendation. The embassy noted an expected completion date of August 2019.

**OIG Reply:** OIG considers the recommendation resolved. The recommendation can be closed when OIG receives and accepts documentation that the work spaces of all Fraud Prevention Unit employees allow for required line-of-sight supervision.

**Recommendation 2:** Embassy Tirana, in coordination with the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations and the Bureau of Consular Affairs, should provide a wheelchair-accessible interview window for consular clients as required by Department standards. (Action: Embassy Tirana, in coordination with OBO and CA)

**Management Response:** In its July 12, 2019, response, Embassy Tirana concurred with this recommendation. The embassy noted an estimated completion date of September 2020.

**OIG Reply:** OIG considers the recommendation resolved. The recommendation can be closed when OIG receives and accepts documentation that the embassy provided a wheelchair-accessible interview window for consular clients.

**Recommendation 3:** Embassy Tirana, in coordination with the Bureau of Consular Affairs, should post adequate signage for the embassy's public areas to assist and direct consular clients. (Action: Embassy Tirana, in coordination with CA)

**Management Response:** In its July 12, 2019, response, Embassy Tirana concurred with this recommendation. The embassy noted an expected completion date of September 2019.

**OIG Reply:** OIG considers the recommendation resolved. The recommendation can be closed when OIG receives and accepts documentation that Embassy Tirana posted adequate signage for its public areas to assist and direct consular clients.

**Recommendation 4:** Embassy Tirana should establish internal controls to safeguard and control the Facility Management Office's expendable supplies in accordance with Department standards. (Action: Embassy Tirana)

**Management Response:** In its July 12, 2019, response, Embassy Tirana concurred with this recommendation.

**OIG Reply:** OIG considers the recommendation resolved. The recommendation can be closed when OIG receives and accepts documentation of internal controls to safeguard and control the Facility Management Office's expendable supplies in accordance with Department standards.

**Recommendation 5:** Embassy Tirana should secure and account for all leftover construction materials in accordance with Department standards. (Action: Embassy Tirana)

**Management Response:** In its July 12, 2019, response, Embassy Tirana concurred with this recommendation.

**OIG Reply:** OIG considers the recommendation resolved. The recommendation can be closed when OIG receives and accepts documentation that Embassy Tirana secured and accounted for all leftover construction materials in accordance with Department standards.

**Recommendation 6:** Embassy Tirana, in coordination with the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations, should perform seismic evaluations of embassy residential properties in accordance with Department standards. (Action: Embassy Tirana, in coordination with OBO)

**Management Response:** In its July 12, 2019, response, Embassy Tirana concurred with this recommendation.

**OIG Reply:** OIG considers the recommendation resolved. The recommendation can be closed when OIG receives and accepts documentation of seismic evaluations of embassy residential properties.

**Recommendation 7:** The Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations, in coordination with Embassy Tirana, should provide a mitigation plan to address seismic concerns with at-risk embassy compound buildings. (Action: OBO, in coordination with Embassy Tirana)

**Management Response:** In its July 10, 2019, response, the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations concurred with this recommendation.

**OIG Reply:** OIG considers the recommendation resolved. The recommendation can be closed when OIG receives and accepts documentation of a mitigation plan to address seismic concerns with at-risk embassy compound buildings.

**Recommendation 8:** Embassy Tirana should work with landlords to mitigate vulnerabilities with community swimming pools at its leased residential compounds. (Action: Embassy Tirana)

**Management Response:** In its July 12, 2019, response, Embassy Tirana concurred with this recommendation.

**OIG Reply:** OIG considers the recommendation resolved. The recommendation can be closed when OIG receives and accepts documentation that Embassy Tirana worked with landlords to mitigate vulnerabilities with community swimming pools at its leased residential compounds.

**Recommendation 9:** Embassy Tirana should dismantle and remove its shipping containers and portable structures in accordance with Department requirements. (Action: Embassy Tirana)

**Management Response:** In its July 12, 2019, response, Embassy Tirana concurred with this recommendation. The embassy noted an estimated completion date of October 2019.

**OIG Reply:** OIG considers the recommendation resolved. The recommendation can be closed when OIG receives and accepts documentation that Embassy Tirana dismantled and removed its shipping containers and portable structures in accordance with Department requirements.

**Recommendation 10:** Embassy Tirana, in coordination with the Bureau of Human Resources, should update its local compensation plan to reflect current Government of Albania labor law. (Action Embassy Tirana, in coordination with DGHR)

**Management Response:** In its July 12, 2019, response, Embassy Tirana concurred with this recommendation. The embassy noted an estimated completion date of September 2019.

**OIG Reply:** OIG considers the recommendation resolved. The recommendation can be closed when OIG receives and accepts documentation that Embassy Tirana updated its local compensation plan to reflect current Government of Albania labor law.

## PRINCIPAL OFFICIALS

Title	Name	Arrival Date
<b>Chiefs of Mission:</b>		
Chargé d’Affaires	Leyla Moses-Ones	8/2018
Acting Deputy Chief of Mission	Dan Koski	6/2016
<b>Chiefs of Sections:</b>		
Management	Lori Johnson	3/2017
Consular (Acting)	Joseph Duran	7/2018
International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs	Juliet Craven	8/2018
Political-Economic	Carson Relitz Rocker	8/2017
Public Diplomacy	Brian Beckmann	7/2018
Regional Security	Janet Meyer	6/2018
<b>Other Agencies:</b>		
Department of Defense/Defense Attaché	James Hilton	1/2018
Office of Defense Cooperation	Joshua Glendening	8/2017
Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance, and Training	Jon Smibert	9/2014
International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program	Steve Bennett	6/2011
Peace Corps	Kate Becker	1/2016
U.S. Agency for International Development	Mikaela Meredith	7/2018

**Source:** Generated by OIG from data provided by Embassy Tirana.

## APPENDIX A: OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

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This inspection was conducted from February 19 to May 17, 2019, in accordance with the Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation, as issued in 2012 by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency, and the Inspector's Handbook, as issued by the Office of Inspector General (OIG) for the Department and the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM).

### Objectives and Scope

The Office of Inspections provides the Secretary of State, the Chief Executive Officer of USAGM, and Congress with systematic and independent evaluations of the operations of the Department and USAGM. Inspections cover three broad areas, consistent with Section 209 of the Foreign Service Act of 1980:

- **Policy Implementation:** whether policy goals and objectives are being effectively achieved and U.S. interests are accurately and effectively represented; and whether all elements of an office or mission are being adequately coordinated.
- **Resource Management:** whether resources are being used and managed with maximum efficiency, effectiveness, and economy and whether financial transactions and accounts are properly conducted, maintained, and reported.
- **Management Controls:** whether the administration of activities and operations meets the requirements of applicable laws and regulations; whether internal management controls have been instituted to ensure quality of performance and reduce the likelihood of mismanagement; and whether instances of fraud, waste, or abuse exist and whether adequate steps for detection, correction, and prevention have been taken.

### Methodology

In conducting inspections, OIG uses a risk-based approach to prepare for each inspection; reviews pertinent records; circulates surveys and compiles the results, as appropriate; conducts interviews with Department and on-site personnel; observes daily operations; and reviews the substance of the report and its findings and recommendations with offices, individuals, and organizations affected by the review. OIG uses professional judgment, along with physical, documentary, testimonial, and analytical evidence collected or generated, to develop findings, conclusions, and actionable recommendations.

## APPENDIX B: MANAGEMENT RESPONSES

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*Embassy of the United States of America*

July 12, 2019

UNCLASSIFIED

THRU: Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs – Philip T. Reeker, Acting Assistant Secretary

TO: OIG – Sandra Lewis, Assistant Inspector General for Inspections

FROM: Embassy Tirana – Leyla Moses-Ones, Chargé d’Affaires, a.i.

SUBJECT: Response to Draft OIG Report – Inspection of Embassy Tirana

Embassy Tirana has reviewed the draft OIG inspection report. We provide the following comments in response to the recommendations provided by the OIG:

**OIG Recommendation 1:** Embassy Tirana, in coordination with the Bureau of Consular Affairs, should adapt the work spaces of all Fraud Prevention Unit employees to allow for required line-of-sight supervision. (Action: Embassy Tirana, in coordination with CA)

**Management Response:** Embassy Tirana concurs with the recommendation. The Facility Management Section will modify all existing Fraud Prevention Unit workstations to allow for required line-of-site supervision, in accordance with 7 FAH-1 H-282 (Evaluating Consular Section Space). The expected completion date is August 2019.

**OIG Recommendation 2:** Embassy Tirana, in coordination with the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations and the Bureau of Consular Affairs, should provide a wheelchair-accessible interview window for consular clients as required by Department standards. (Action: Embassy Tirana, in coordination with OBO and CA)

**Management Response:** Embassy Tirana concurs with the recommendation. In February 2017, Embassy Tirana submitted a request to the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (BMIS #6N-8199) requesting the installation of a wheelchair-accessible interview window. OBO/AM informed CA/EX in July 2019 that the wheelchair-accessible window request will be addressed in FY 2020.

**OIG Recommendation 3:** Embassy Tirana, in coordination with the Bureau of Consular Affairs, should post adequate signage for the Embassy’s public areas to assist and direct consular clients. (Action: Embassy Tirana, in coordination with CA)

**Management Response:** Embassy Tirana concurs with the recommendation. The Consular Section has ordered new signs for placement in public areas to assist and direct consular clients.

The estimated production and shipping time for the new signage is six-to-eight weeks. The expected completion date is September 2019.

**OIG Recommendation 4:** Embassy Tirana should establish internal controls to safeguard and control the Facility Management Office's expendable supplies in accordance with Department standards. (Action: Embassy Tirana)

**Management Response:** Embassy Tirana concurs with this recommendation. The Facility Manager has instructed GSO Property staff to receive and enter all expendable supplies in the expendable supplies system before issuance.

**OIG Recommendation 5:** Embassy Tirana should secure and account for all leftover construction materials in accordance with Department standards. (Action: Embassy Tirana)

**Management Response:** Embassy Tirana concurs with this recommendation. The Facility Manager will instruct project managers to properly secure all leftover construction materials and record them in the expendable property inventory. Management will ensure that future TDY teams and sections responsible for the work are aware of this requirement.

**OIG Recommendation 6:** Embassy Tirana, in coordination with the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations, should perform seismic evaluations of Embassy residential properties in accordance with Department standards. (Action: Embassy Tirana, in coordination with OBO)

**Management Response:** Embassy Tirana concurs with this recommendation. Following a July 2016 seismic survey, Post terminated residential leases in the area of town the survey rated "very poor" for seismic vulnerability. Post has identified a local engineering company to perform seismic evaluations and will submit documentation about the engineers' qualifications to OBO for review. Pending OBO's acceptance of an engineer's qualifications and proposal to conduct seismic evaluations, and/or upon obtaining building structural design documentation, Post will work with OBO to perform engineering seismic evaluations, as required by Department regulations.

**OIG Recommendation 7:** The Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations, in coordination with Embassy Tirana, should provide a mitigation plan to address seismic concerns with at-risk Embassy compound buildings. (Action: OBO, in coordination with Embassy Tirana)

**Management Response:** The Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations and Embassy Tirana concur with this recommendation. The OBO Natural Hazards Program is working with Post to ensure seismic risks at Embassy Tirana are identified and prioritized against worldwide seismic risk mitigation plans.

**OIG Recommendation 8:** Embassy Tirana should work with landlords to mitigate vulnerabilities with community swimming pools at its leased residential compounds. (Action: Embassy Tirana)

**Management Response:** Embassy Tirana concurs with this recommendation. At the housing compounds where Post has leased properties with no pool fencing, property management had previously declined Post's request to provide pool fencing. The Facility Management Section is now in the process of creating scopes of work for proposed new fencing. Post will then re-open negotiations in September 2019 with property management at the compounds regarding sharing the



costs of the projects. In the interim, Post is taking active steps to liaise with property managers about putting in place other safeguards for pool safety. Private yards in the housing compounds have fences with self-closing/latching gates that meet SHEMA standards.

**OIG Recommendation 9:** Embassy Tirana should dismantle and remove its shipping containers and portable structures in accordance with Department requirements. (Action: Embassy Tirana)

**Management Response:** Embassy Tirana concurs with the recommendation. The estimated completion date for dismantling shipping containers on the Embassy compound is October 2019. On the U.S. Government-owned residential complex, Post continues to use containers as a temporary solution to a long-term critical issue of insufficient space. Containers there will be dismantled and removed once a new, expanded warehouse can be completed. Post submitted the new warehouse project proposal to the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations in February 2019.

**OIG Recommendation 10:** Embassy Tirana, in coordination with the Bureau of Human Resources, should update its local compensation plan to reflect current Government of Albania labor law. (Action Embassy Tirana, in coordination with DGHR)

**Management Response:** Embassy Tirana concurs with this recommendation. Post has submitted proposed language for the local compensation plan; it is currently pending HR/OE approval. The following actions are required to close this recommendation: (1) HR/OE's final authorization for the proposed changes; (2) Charleston/Payroll creates the new pay codes in the system; and (3) the revised local compensation plan is approved by agencies at post and updated. The estimated completion date is September 2019.

The point of contact for this memorandum is Daniel Koski, Acting Deputy Chief of Mission.





United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

JUL 10 2019

**UNCLASSIFIED MEMORANDUM**

TO:           OIG/ISP – Sandra Lewis

FROM:        OBO/RM – Jeff Reba, Acting *7/12/19*

SUBJECT:     Response to OIG Draft Report - Inspection of Embassy Tirana, Albania  
Report No. ISP-I-19-26

OBO has reviewed the draft OIG inspection report. We provide the following comments in response to the recommendation provided by OIG.

**Recommendation 7:** The Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations, in coordination with Embassy Tirana, should provide a mitigation plan to address seismic concerns with at-risk embassy compound buildings. (Action: OBO, in coordination with Embassy Tirana)

**OBO Response:** OBO and Embassy Tirana concur with this recommendation. The OBO Natural Hazards Program is working with Post to ensure that seismic risks at Embassy Tirana are identified and will be prioritized against worldwide seismic risk mitigation plans.

The point of contact for this memorandum is Amy Gertsch.

UNCLASSIFIED

## ABBREVIATIONS

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CA	Bureau of Consular Affairs
DCM	Deputy Chief of Mission
DGHR	Bureau of Human Resources
EEO	Equal Employment Opportunity
FAH	Foreign Affairs Handbook
FAM	Foreign Affairs Manual
FAST	First- and Second-Tour
ICS	Integrated Country Strategy
INL	Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs
IT	Information Technology
LE	Locally Employed
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OBO	Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

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