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<b>Title</b>	<i>Japan fingerprints foreigners as anti-terror move</i>

Japan began fingerprinting foreigners entering the country on Tuesday in an anti-terrorism policy that has sparked complaints from human right activists, business travellers and long-term residents.

“At a time when terrorism is occurring throughout the world, we want foreigners entering Japan to cooperate, and to understand that it is better for them as well that Japan be safe,” said Hisashi Toshioka, head of the Immigration Bureau at Narita airport, the main international airport serving Tokyo.

“The biggest objective is to prevent terrorism.”

Critics, however, say the new procedures reflect a deeply entrenched view in Japan of foreigners as more likely to commit crimes and plays down the possibility of home-grown terrorism.

“In Japan, fingerprinting has been limited to those arrested for crimes, so treating foreigners the same way is a serious human rights violation,” said Mitsuru Namba, a lawyer at the Japan Federation of Lawyers Associations.

“The government says the aim is to prevent terrorism, but in the background is discrimination linking foreigners with crime and overstaying visas,” Namba said, noting the data would be kept even after a visitor was deemed not to be a terrorist suspect.

Some foreign visitors arriving at Narita were unfazed by the new procedures, which involve electronic scanning of both index fingers as well as taking a digital facial photo.

The data is compared with international and domestic lists and anyone considered to be a terrorist -- or refusing to cooperate -- will be denied entry and deported.

“It didn't bother me at all. It was pretty uninvasive,” said Jake Heinrich, 33, an Australian who works at a language school.

“These days, it probably makes you feel a little safer.”

The measures are similar to the “U.S. Visit” system introduced in the United States after the Sept. 11 attacks in 2001.

In a nod to historical sensitivities, “special” permanent residents of Korean and Chinese origin -- many born in Japan and descended from those brought as forced labour before and during World War Two -- are exempt, as are diplomats and children under 16.

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Fingerprinting of such residents was abolished in 1992 after a lengthy campaign, while fingerprinting of all foreign residents ended in 2000.

“Japanese will get the message that foreigners are incipient criminals,” said Choi Sun-ae, a Korean resident of Japan who campaigned to abolish fingerprinting and on Tuesday took part in a protest outside the Justice Ministry in Tokyo.

Unlike the United States, Japan requires resident foreigners as well as visitors to be fingerprinted and photographed every time they re-enter the country, although if they pre-register they can go through a fast-track line.

That has angered many resident foreigners, who have until now been able to line up with Japanese for faster processing.

“My husband is Japanese. I have two Japanese adult children working in Tokyo. I feel slightly insulted,” said Briton Jennifer Ukawa, 69, who has lived in Japan off and on since 1969 and also took part in Tuesday's protest.

Britain this month began requiring people applying for UK visas to have their fingerprints scanned and photographs taken digitally.

Some worry that longer lines at points of entry could discourage tourists and business travellers, even as Japan tries to polish its image as a tourist destination and global financial centre.

“Suddenly grouping long-term residents and taxpayers in Japan with occasional visitors risks creating excessive delays for frequent business travellers and imposing unacceptable costs on businesses,” said the European Business Council in Japan and the Australian and New Zealand Chamber of Commerce in Japan in a letter to the Justice Ministry.

Immigration officials said the procedures went smoothly on Tuesday morning except for a glitch with one machine and that the average wait was 20 minutes.