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ICAO MEETING RECOMMENDS MEASURES TO REDUCE AIRPORT CONGESTION AND INCREASE AVIATION SECURITY

MONTREAL, 01 April 2004 - The 12th Session of the Facilitation Division of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) ended today with a number of recommendations aimed at smoother passage of travellers through airport controls, heightened aviation security and added protection against identity theft.

About 475 delegates from governments and the global air transport industry took part in the meeting held in Cairo (Egypt) from 22 March to 1 April, under the theme of “Managing Security Challenges to Facilitate Air Transport Operations”.

A key recommendation calls for all 188 ICAO Member States to have begun issuing machine readable passports by 2010, in accordance with ICAO specifications. Some 88 States already issue standard machine-readable passports.

Participants also recommended that States incorporate biometrics for further strengthening their travel documents. Biometrics is a means of identifying a person by biological features unique to an individual, using advanced computerized recognition techniques. This makes possible rapid comparison, either one-to-one with the person and document, or one-to-many using a database to positively identify an individual.

In May 2003, ICAO adopted a global, harmonized blueprint for integrating biometric identification information into passports and other Machine Readable Travel Documents (MRTDs), including face as the preferred biometric for machine-assisted identity confirmation with MRTDs. The face has long been used by border control authorities and airline staff at airports to confirm identity with a “photo ID”. Facial recognition technology automates this process, using a camera to capture the image of the face, while a computer validates facial characteristics.

Other recommendations include a standardized approach to advance passenger information (API) systems, conforming to guidelines jointly maintained by ICAO, the World Customs Organization and the International Air Transport Association (IATA). API is an electronic data interchange system whereby airlines transmit their passengers’ passport details in advance, to permit more rapid clearance at airport customs and immigration check points.

A harmonized approach to Passenger Name Record (PNR) access developed under the auspices of ICAO was also recommended for those States that use this procedure, as were numerous updates to provisions related to travel document security, air crew identity, preventing travel document fraud and handling inadmissible persons.

Regarding international health issues, it was recommended that States adopt a model contingency response plan to be implemented in the event of major health emergencies of international concern such as a possible recurrence of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) or outbreak of other highly contagious diseases. Shortly after the first outbreak of SARS last year, ICAO published guidelines, in cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Air Transport Association (IATA) to help stop the international spread of the disease by air.

“I believe that the recommendations coming out of this meeting will contribute significantly to the establishment of new standards and far-sighted policies that will facilitate the flow of traffic at airports, limit or avoid disruptions to passengers, and deal effectively with threats to the safety and security of international civil aviation,” stated Dr. Assad Kotaite, President of the Council of ICAO.

The recommendations will be submitted for consideration by the Council of ICAO. Upon approval, they will be incorporated into the Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) of Annex 9 - Facilitation - of the *Convention on International Civil Aviation* or adopted as ICAO policy.

Comprehensive background documentation on the Cairo meeting is available on the ICAO website at www.icao.int while information on Machine Readable Travel Documents can be found at www.icao.int/mrtd.

A specialized agency of the United Nations, ICAO was created in 1944 to promote the safe and orderly development of international civil aviation throughout the world. It sets standards and regulations necessary for aviation safety, security, efficiency and regularity, as well as for aviation environmental protection. The Organization serves as the forum for cooperation in all fields of civil aviation among its 188 Contracting States.