



**Address by the Secretary General
of the International Civil Aviation Organization,
Raymond Benjamin
at the opening of the nineteenth meeting of the
Technical Advisory Group – Machine Readable Travel Documents
Montréal, 7 December 2009**

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to this 19th TAG/MRTD meeting.

The ICAO MRTD Programme has gained solid momentum since its inception four decades ago and continues to be regarded as the global leader in setting and maintaining specifications for machine readable travel documents. I want to acknowledge here today the government experts in the New Technologies Working Group who have contributed so much of their time, resources and expertise to ensure that the specifications and best practices outlined in Document 9303 always remain relevant.

MRTD security standards are stringent and technically complex. However, setting standards and specifications, although vital, is not sufficient. Given that a number of developing States lack the expertise and resources to implement ICAO provisions, technical cooperation and capacity-building activities become as necessity. A good example is the April 2010 deadline for global implementation of Machine Readable Passports, which is unlikely to be met by about ten States unless capacity-building projects are carried out. In this context, I am pleased to see that the work of the Implementation and Capacity Building Working Group is gaining ground, with vocational training initiatives, project development and liaison with donor agencies. This increased level of activity is a promising sign and I wish the Working Group every success.

Special recognition must also be given to our partners, the international and regional organizations that have supported and actively participated in educating, promoting and implementing projects in the area of MRPs. This ongoing collaboration and renewed efforts to coordinate donor funds and expertise mean that the MRTD Programme will be able to strengthen its capacity-building undertakings.

Along these lines, I want to reassure TAG members that although ICAO is faced with a scarcity of resources, we will continue to invest in the development and implementation of the MRTD Programme and assistance activities.

A measure of our commitment is the decision to make good on your recommendation to provide all parts of DOC 9393 free of charge on the MRTD Programme website. To me this makes sense. Doc 9303 remains of limited value unless all member States are able to benefit openly from its guidance and for some, money has been a problem. I trust that this initiative will be a significant step forward in accelerating the implementation of MRTD specifications globally.

What I find particularly exciting and promising is the recent evolution in the activities of the TAG and its working groups from developing specifications to dealing with the full cycle of identity management. More attention is being paid to the document pre-issuance stage, with an emphasis on developing best practices and guidance material for breeder documentation and civil registries. We must also determine how to prevent abuses in identity management following the issuance of MRTDs, for example by finding ways to improve border control capacity and to combat travel document fraud. New technologies, including eVisas and automated border controls, have can further contribute to facilitation, border security and aviation security in an integrated manner. I am confident that the TAG/MRTD working groups will continue to make significant advances in these areas.

Another important influence on our work has been the focus on security and counter-terrorism at the international level. In addition to their facilitation benefits, MRTDs are a powerful tool to prevent terrorism and trans-border crime. The MRTD Programme remains uniquely placed to address these growing concerns at the global level.

And so, ladies and gentlemen, your plate is full! So I will conclude here by thanking you again for all of your hard work. I am confident that the standard of excellence that you have demonstrated through the years will serve us well as we strive to ensure that the MRTD Programme's relevance is in keeping with the evolving needs and the ever-changing security environment. I wish you all a successful TAG/MRTD meeting.

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