



Opening Remarks by the Secretary General
of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO),
Mr. Raymond Benjamin
to the first meeting of the Joint ICAO-WCO Working Group
On Advance Cargo Information

(Singapore, 4 August 2014)

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

It is truly a pleasure for me to address the first meeting of the Joint ICAO-WCO Working Group on Advance Cargo Information.

On behalf of ICAO and our colleagues at the World Customs Organization (WCO), I would like to thank all of you for travelling from all over the globe to discuss this timely and important subject here in Singapore with your counterparts in the aviation security and Customs fields.

This meeting's convening is a clear example of the level and nature of the teamwork I had in mind, early in my mandate as ICAO Secretary General, when I signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with WCO Secretary General Kunio Mikuriya. Given our common interest in the safe and efficient transport of goods by air, there were strong grounds for ICAO / WCO collaboration on a range of technical matters and it is very encouraging to see that work moving forward here today.

Since signing the 2011 Memorandum, ICAO and the WCO have established a solid track record for collaboration. From the outset, we have found opportunities to work together to improve global supply chain security while expediting the movement of goods at the same time. A number of joint initiatives have been completed successfully and others are now underway or planned.

I am pleased to be able to report here today that ICAO and the WCO are now working much more in unison – and to the benefit of all air cargo stakeholders. I would also highlight in this regard that this new Working Group is an important component of our joint endeavours.

From an aviation security perspective, Advance Cargo Information could prove invaluable with respect to how we assess shipment risk in general while singling out higher risk cargo for enhanced security measures. Advance information already plays a vital role for customs officials in this manner, facilitating the transport of cargo shipments, but what I would propose here is that potentially this data could be even more useful.

If so, we may be able to realize a win-win scenario; one whereby Advance Cargo Information contributes to both the effectiveness of security and facilitation – and on a much more integrated and effective basis. Understandably, ICAO is eager to examine this potential.

Of course, we have a long road to travel before implementing an Advance Cargo Information system that serves both aviation security and customs stakeholders. At this stage we don't even know if a system of this nature is possible to implement, and one of your first tasks will be to find consensus on that point.

One can appreciate, for example, that a new system would have to take into account the complexity of the air cargo supply chain, the variety of cargo operations, the different business models, the benefits of a 'single window' for receipt of data, and the respective mandates of aviation security and Customs authorities. This hypothetical system would also have to be integrated in the cargo handling process in a way that respects operational constraints.

Two underlying priorities in this regard are that, firstly, Advance Cargo Information for aviation security purposes should not diminish the competitiveness of the air cargo industry. Secondly, its application must demonstrate clear aviation security value.

In this regard, I am pleased to see that the membership of this Joint Working Group includes a strong industry voice. This is highly appropriate, given today's emphasis on enhancing facilitation, and it is therefore vital that we continue to consider how any of our decisions might impact cargo operations.

Yet another area that could prove challenging is how we agree to handle cargo data. Based on ICAO's real-world experience with implementing Advance Passenger Information and Passenger Name Record (API/PNR) data exchange systems, achieving worldwide harmonization in the management and transmission of cargo data will be a major undertaking.

ICAO and the WCO eagerly await your results. We expect, through your efforts, to determine if it is feasible to use Advance Cargo Information to enhance air cargo security without hampering the movement of low-risk goods. If the answer is yes, then the Joint Working Group will have to pave the way by developing a concept of operations.

The journey along this path may call for compromise, that much is almost certain, but what is important for now is to ask the right questions of each other and explore the best options – in a true spirit of openness and international cooperation.

I would like to conclude my opening remarks by extending a special thank you to the Singapore Ministry of Transport for graciously hosting this meeting.

I wish you every success in your deliberations.

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