

6th MRTD SYMPOSIUM
Montreal, Canada 1-4 November 2010

ICAO's leading role in setting global MRTD SARPs and specifications: history, the state of play and agenda for the future

Mrs. Folasade Odutola
Director, Air Transport Bureau, ICAO

I am delighted to have this opportunity to address this distinguished audience and provide some reflections on the past and the future of the MRTD Programme.

As mentioned just a moment ago by the Secretary General, this year marks the thirtieth anniversary of publication of ICAO Document 9303, the 'body of knowledge' that outlines specifications for machine-readable passports, visas and ID cards, including biometric travel documents. The first edition, issued in 1980, described the basic principles of a machine-readable passport. Today's Doc 9303 is comprised of three comprehensive parts that elaborate on state-of-the-art technical specifications for machine-readable and biometric travel documents. The document will continue to expand and evolve in response to future needs.

It's worthy of note that ICAO's work on machine-readable travel documents actually began long before the appearance of Doc 9303, with the establishment of the ICAO Panel on Passport Cards in 1968. The Panel was tasked with developing recommendations for a standardized passport book or card that would be machine readable, thus facilitating the clearance of passengers through passport controls. Its recommendations took into account the cost effectiveness and reliability of different technologies, and culminated in the first edition of Doc 9303, then titled *A Passport with Machine-Readable Capability*. In those early days, Doc 9303 served as the guideline for issuing machine-readable passports in Australia, Canada and the United States. Today, of course, it guides all of the world's States.

In 1984, ICAO established the Technical Advisory Group on Machine-Readable Travel Documents, or TAG/MRTD for short. The group is comprised of government officials who specialize in border controls and specifically the issuance of passports and other travel documents. The TAG/MRTD had an initial mandate of taking over the activities of the Panel on Passport Cards. Subsequently, the group's mandate was expanded to include machine-readable visas and cards.

For this Symposium we have the honour of having among the participants two very important players in the establishment and development of the MRTD Programme: Mr. Rod Heitmeyer, former Chief of the Joint Financing and Facilities Management Branch; and Mr. René Pouliot, Former Chief of Facilitation and first Secretary of the TAG/MRTD. Gentlemen, please, could you please give them an applause!. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your work and support to the MRTD Programme. The work and vision of these and other early visionaries from ICAO, States' governments and ISO, laid the foundation for this very successful programme as we know it today.

As an example of the work achieved in the early days, I hold in my hands the very first copy of Doc 9303 titled: A Passport with Machine Readable Capability, published in 1980. This working copy holds hand written notes from Mr. Pouliot, and we understand it was the same copy that was sent to ISO for homologating the standards and specifications established therein. We will continue to keep this precious document in our archives.

But enough of history. Let us focus on the current agenda, and today's realities.

Past accomplishments raise a fundamental question: How do we maximize the benefits of the MRTD Programme and ensure its continued relevance?

Very often we are asked whether the MRTD Programme is part of ICAO's facilitation work. At the dawn of the MRTD programme, the emphasis was indeed on passenger facilitation. Air passenger traffic was surging and the immediate concern was how to carry out border formalities more quickly and economically, in order not to hinder civil aviation operations. It was only logical that the early MRTD-related standards and recommended practices were incorporated in Annex 9 – *Facilitation*, as is still the case.

Things changed fundamentally after 9/11, however. The facilitation agenda remains relevant and important, but in today's global security environment, the main focus of the MRTD Programme includes combating terrorism and transborder crimes, by enhancing border security.

This brings us to another fundamental question. How did the MRTD Programme, which started as a set of technical specifications for globally interoperable passports and other travel documents, become a centre point in the contemporary global security agenda?

The events of 11 September 2001 highlighted the need for States to adopt innovative and proactive approaches for combating terrorism and related transborder crime. Many new approaches were tried, with some working better than others. But true global consensus was evident in the recognition that effective counter-terrorist measures have to be based on intelligence. Security threats are posed by individuals and groups. Knowledge about those persons and their intentions helps to predict the level of threat and empowers law enforcement agencies.

But unfortunately intelligence applications can be circumvented by false identity. Even if a database indicates, say, that John Smith is a suspected terrorist, no alert will be generated when this person crosses the border using someone else's name. This is why reliable identity management is the cornerstone of global intelligence-based counter-terrorism measures. And robust MRTD and identity management can be achieved only by complying with the relevant standards developed so successfully by ICAO. To prevent security incidents, we require passenger screening measures combined with effective use of intelligence and reliable identity management. While passenger screening certainly has a role to play, it remains just one layer of defence, and on occasion this is insufficient to ensure security.

As a result of incidents such as the NWA flight 253 of 25 December last year, the "security of the future" is likely to be more comprehensive, with numerous security layers reinforcing each other. However, there is no need to reinvent the wheel. Border security and law enforcement have been intelligence-led for decades, relying heavily on information collection,

analysis and timely dissemination to front-line officers. It may be feasible to integrate border security best practices with the aviation security process, enhancing both.

This, certainly, is food for thought — and I trust this Symposium will serve as an important forum for eliciting various views on where the MRTD Programme should move in the future. The programme's future is our common concern, and the views of industry and government stakeholders will assist immensely with our policy review.

Thank you very much for your attention.

- END -