

WELCOME REMARKS – HON. H. CHARLES FERNANDEZ

ICAO Traveler Identification Programme (ICAO TRIP) Regional Seminar – 31st January, 2017 to 2nd February, 2017

On behalf of the Government of Antigua and Barbuda, I welcome all participants, both local and foreign, to this International Civil Aviation Organisation Traveler Identification Programme (ICAO TRIP) Regional Seminar being hosted on our own bit of paradise where the beach is only the beginning.

I also want to thank the organizers from ICAO for choosing Antigua as their destination for this conference. The Government and people of Antigua and Barbuda are both honoured and humbled.

Antigua and Barbuda as a State Party to the Chicago Convention 1944, and in particular Annex 9 – Facilitation, the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 2178 (2014) and 2309 (2016), recognizes the need for an integrated border management framework, which takes into account balancing border security, Annex 9 – facilitation and ICAO Traveler Identification programme.

The world as we know it and travel as a whole has changed since the attacks of 9/11 and the safety of our borders goes way beyond our own borders and indeed we are our brother's keepers in the fight against terrorism and transnational crime. Antigua and Barbuda being as uniquely geographically positioned as it is and the Eastern Caribbean as a whole are part of a matrix that requires working

together and cooperating with each other and our international partners to ensure the safety of passengers, whether they are visiting our shores or transiting to other countries.

It is important that we network together to prevent nefarious characters and those intent on causing instability and harm to our own nationals and persons visiting our shores.

It is equally important that we prevent these disruptable characters from using our peaceful and beautiful twin island state as a stepping stone to other countries to spread discord. Within the Eastern Caribbean most of our Islands rely heavily on tourists coming from North America and Europe. As such to protect our tourism product, our nationals and to the travelling public at large, it is imperative that steps are

taken and continue to be taken ensure that we act in accordance with a number of international standards and best practices to include the ICAO Traveler Identification Programme (TRIP) and all other principles primarily adopted for protecting travelers.

Just over ten years ago in 2006 the Government of Antigua and Barbuda introduced Machine Readable Passports in keeping with international standards and now anxiously look forward to further enhancing the security of our passports and passenger identification as we move to introduce E-passports by the end of the first quarter of 2017. Canadian Bank Note as the suppliers of our present Border Management System continues to work with and support the Government of Antigua and Barbuda in this venture. The new passports are custom made for Antigua and Barbuda, and will feature national sites

and iconic individuals and of course will have added security features. These added security features which will make the passport significantly less susceptible to being replicated or if stolen, being used by another person.

The date captured for our e-passports will include...

Presently Antigua and Barbuda enjoys visa free access from over one hundred and forty countries around the world and we must take all necessary steps to ensure that we maintain this significant feature attached to our passports. As such it is important that the Government examines every possible avenue to secure our passports, to include other countries being able to verify that a person presenting an Antiguan passport is in fact the bearer of and that it was validly issued by our Government to

the holder. On the other hand, Immigration Officers at our borders must be satisfied that the person before them being permitted into Antigua and Barbuda is entitled to hold the passport that is being presented.

This of course will require the careful collection and sharing of data with our regional and international partners, the signing of MOU's and having access to the Public Key Directory (PKD) in order to share and access information on the identity of passengers on arrival at all our ports. This very necessary step will also be a useful tool with the introduction of kiosks the arrival and departure areas at the V.C. Bird International Airport.

The issuing of the E-passports will also be significantly improved as the Government takes steps

to create an E-platform which will include the upgrade of the Registry. This upgrade of the Registry Division will create a digitized registry of breeder documents from birth to death to include, marriage certificates and deed polls. With the passport office being able to tap into this registry this will allow for a secure channel in ascertaining the identity of persons applying for passports. The upgrade will also allow for an integrated platform which will permit the Department of Immigration and other stakeholders to access the new digitized Registry to verify documents being presented to the Department for various services.

In April 2016, the Government of Antigua and Barbuda passed the new Advance Passenger Information Act 2016, which is a harmonized piece of legislation to be enacted by all CARICOM Member States. This Act provides for greater time for the

transmitting of passenger information data, the sharing of passenger information with other States which includes PNRs – Passenger Name Record Data and the imposing of sanctions where carriers and vessels do not comply. By endorsing this new Act it is expected that it will allow us to identify suspicious characters such as possible terrorist and those involved in transnational criminal activities, who are travelling to our shores or intending to traverse our region. With the increased time from 15 minutes to 45 minutes prior to the departure of aircrafts, Antigua and Barbuda will be able to have certain persons deplaned and avoid many technicalities that may arise if the person travels to Antigua.

The Joint Regional Communication Centre (JRCC) will negotiate on behalf of all Member States to enter into bilateral and multilateral agreements with other

Countries for the exchange of passenger information and PNRs. Such information will be transmitted into JRCC to be vetted and scrubbed against their data base and if necessary against all international Watchlists.

JRCC is a sub-agency of the CARICOM Implementing Agency for Crime and Security (IMPACS) that works very closely with the Antigua and Barbuda Department of Immigration. The Department works in tandem with the JRCC, which provides daily operational support in security vetting for e-visas and citizenship.

The JRCC also provides daily reports of lost or stolen passports, persons of interest who may be wanted by other local or other law enforcements, regionally or

internationally and they provide vital updates on trends in respect to both legal and illegal migration.

The implementation of the APIS legislation and the coordinated work with the JRCC will allow us, very soon, to have the use of a shortened version of the Embarkation Card thereby, setting the pace for eventually eliminating the need for Embarkation Cards altogether.

Such a move will reduce delays for passengers who arrive in Antigua and Barbuda without Embarkation Cards. It will certainly allow for greater efficiency in the clearing of passengers, facilitating even less time spent in Immigration as passengers will be pre-screened and vetted prior to arriving in Antigua and Barbuda. This will be a boost in our tourism sector as it will allow for passengers to breeze through Immigration, two of things we all hate about travelling,

queues and waiting. This will particularly be useful during the peak traveler periods of the tourist season when most of our international flights arrive in Antigua practically at the same time.

Visitors to our shores can now also apply for an E-visa online. The launch of this initiative has significantly reduced the wait for a visa to Antigua and Barbuda from a three months waiting period. It has introduced an almost seamless process which requires an applicant to complete the application online, upload copies of the required documents and pay the requisite fee online. The processing time for an application is now seven working days or forty eight hours for an expedited e-visa with the payment of an additional fee. Previously, an applicant would have to send all the original documents to Antigua and Barbuda or one of our Missions with a visa

issuing office, these documents included the applicant's passport.

All applicants are vetted and after reviewing the documents, the applicant is issued with a letter as to their success. On arrival to Antigua and Barbuda, the passenger is interviewed to determine admittance, original documents are checked if necessary and it is at this time that the passenger's bio metrics are captured to include photo and finger prints. The introduction of e-visas has propelled Antigua and Barbuda in areas such as tourism, education and commerce as this online process, which has been adopted by other international countries allows for the greater and faster processing of visas combined with the integration of a security and vetting forum.

As a member state of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), the Government of Antigua and Barbuda and the Department of Immigration, remains committed to our economic union. To this end and under the auspices of the OECS Secretariat we will work together with other Members States to create one air space, which will include, among other things an integrate border security systems and the sharing of information.

This could mean for example that a passenger requiring a visa who is entering one OECS Member State, once cleared by that State can then travel freely to another Member State on the same visa. It will also mean that information will be shared almost instantaneously, thereby preventing criminal elements from moving through the member states undetected.

Finally, presently nationals from OECS Member States are permitted to travel on a recognized Identification Card. However, each Member State has a variety of identifications cards that can be used for travel. As such plans are on the way by the OECS Secretariat to have one standard, recognized Identification Card with much needed security features for travel.

In closing, on behalf of the Government of Antigua and Barbuda I again welcome you all to the beautiful state of Antigua and Barbuda, where we boast three hundred and sixty five beaches, one for every day of the year; we are the home of the Black Pineapple renowned as being one of the sweetest pineapples in the world. We also boast as being the home of Sir Vivian Richards, Sir Courtley Ambrose, Sir Andy Roberts, Sir Richie Richardson and many more great

cricketers for those of you who know your cricket history.

Ladies and gentlemen, while you are here, we want you to enjoy our warm and welcoming hospitality, and I do hope that you will get the chance to enjoy at least one of our three hundred and sixty five beaches.

I wish you a sound and productive semiar.

Thank you!