

ICAO EIGHT SYMPOSIUM AND EXHIBITION ON MRTDs,  
BIOMETRICS AND SECURITY STANDARDS

(Montreal, 10 to 12 October 2012)

**Opening Remarks**

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**Representative of Cameroon on the Council**

Excellencies  
Dear colleagues  
Ladies and gentlemen

It is a great pleasure and privilege to welcome you to ICAO's Eight Symposium and Exhibition on MRTDs, Biometrics and Security Standards.

This important annual event addresses state-of-the-art developments in MRTD standards and specifications, identity management and border security issues. It highlights ICAO's global leadership in aviation security, facilitation and related areas. Such leadership is only possible thanks to the support of the government, ISO and other international organizations, and industry experts that make up the Technical Advisory Group on Machine Readable Travel Documents (TAG/MRTD).

This year's Symposium focuses on the human dimension. It will explore global humanitarian assistance efforts where reliable identification and issuance of travel documents play an important role in post-disaster or post-conflict rehabilitation. The contribution of the ICAO MRTD Programme will be highlighted. Case studies will be presented by relief organisations and international aid programmes, with reference to identity management and travel documents. The human dimension also builds on the MRTD Programme's ongoing cooperation with the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) addressing the special needs of refugees and stateless persons.

While the world in which we live is becoming increasingly secure, our fundamental human needs – such as safety, dignity and freedom from fear - remain unchanged. Speakers at this Symposium will go beyond national security and look into human security issues, the need to ensure human rights and freedoms, and to create an environment where people can maximise their economic and societal potential. The Symposium programme also explores the

security-development nexus and on-going efforts to assist the developing world with strengthening identity management capacity and promoting best civil registration practices.

Meanwhile, on the traditional MRTD agenda, the central theme remains the importance of implementing the ePassport issuance projects to achieve their full security and facilitation benefits, including ensuring their proper reading at borders. Current specifications for issuing ICAO-compliant electronic Passports provide a solid foundation for assuring the most secure and robust travel document ever issued. Over 104 States claim they are currently issuing ePassports with about 400 million ePassports in circulation—close to a third of all passports worldwide. And these numbers continue to increase.

Given the intensity of ePassport implementation world-wide, does it mean that the conventional machine-readable passport is becoming the legacy of the past? Does it mean that the world is ready for a universal standard requiring States to switch to issuing ePassports?

In practice, not quite yet, as significant work remains to be completed by States before ePassports provide their full security and facilitation benefits.

An ePassport is only as secure as the biometric information contained in its chip, and useful only if the data can be validated quickly and securely. Not all ePassports are fully compliant with ICAO specifications yet. This prevents issuing States from capitalizing on full security and facilitation benefits that ePassports are meant to deliver.

Indeed, there is a big difference between a properly implemented ePassport and a passport with a chip. The first presents the most secure travel document the world has ever known. The second is a giant of clay feet that, if not implemented properly, presents security vulnerabilities and a deceptive illusion of security. The difference between the two is enormous. Hence the importance of getting the ePassport right.

The importance of the MRTD Programme and the issuance of electronic travel documents is not limited to States. In August 2012, the United Nations launched the electronic Laissez-Passer (e-UNLP) fully compliant with ICAO standards. The UN has also become a member of ICAO's Public Key Directory (PKD) making available worldwide information required to validate and authenticate this travel document. The e-UNLP is an identity document for UN officials travelling officially on duty to promote the principles and objectives of the United Nations. The eUNLP, implemented in close partnership with ICAO, has been a shining example of a state-of-art electronic travel document taking full

advantage of PKD security benefits. Given this momentous security upgrade, I encourage all States to recognize the eUNLP to facilitate the official travel of UN staff. Also, ICAO has set up a booth located in the Atrium, where you will see a live demonstration of ePassport reading systems using the PKD to verify and authenticated ePassports and the electronic Laissez Passer. I invite you to visit the booth.

Implementation assistance to States has gained considerable momentum, is a major area of ICAO's ongoing work, and features as an important item on the Symposium programme. There remain considerable technical assistance needs related to MRTDs and border controls. ICAO speakers will explore current global capacity gaps and challenges, look into the present and future of ICAO's technical assistance related to MRTDs and border controls, and reflect on the prospects and priorities of enhancing capacity-building assistance to Member States.

The final session of the Symposium focuses on the policy-making process at ICAO. It explores the roles of the ICAO Assembly, Council and its Committees, and other bodies to provide an insider's perspective on how ICAO Standards and Recommended Practices are developed. The purpose of this session is to empower members of the MRTD to make their voice heard in ICAO deliberations and decision making

I would like to invite all participants to visit the Exhibition and learn about the latest MRTD-related technology, products and systems currently available.

This Symposium presents a challenging and exciting programme that will capture your full attention for the next three days. I sincerely thank you for having taken the time to join us here, and wish you a very successful and productive MRTD Symposium.

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