

**TECHNICAL ADVISORY GROUP ON
MACHINE READABLE TRAVEL DOCUMENTS**

Fifteenth Meeting

(Montreal, 17 to 21 May 2004)

Agenda Item 2: Report of the Document Content and Format Working Group

Agenda Item 2.2: Document format and durability issues

USE OF PERSONAL ID NUMBER AS PASSPORT NUMBER

(Presented by the Document Content and Format Working Group (DCFWG))

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The passport number is the basic piece of information for the international traveler. Prior to 1980, passport numbers were not regulated. In 1981 ICAO introduced Doc 9303 Part 1, the Standard for Machine Readable Passports. This fixed the length of the passport number as nine (9) alphanumeric characters or fewer.

1.2 This paper reviews the various national practices that have arisen to establish the passport number, and makes recommendations on two practices to be avoided.

1.3 Increased counterfeit deterrent features in both book production and personalization have made the acquisition of real passports, either stolen unpersonalized books, or stolen from the holder a requirement for the successful forger.

1.4 Interpol is leading an effort to track lost and stolen passports. This effort is considerably hindered by the lack of uniformity between issuing States as to what a passport number is, and how to relate the stolen numbered book to its further illegal use.

2. PASSPORT NUMBER SOURCES

2.1 The simplest and most straightforward method is to use the number assigned to the book by the book printer as the passport number assigned to the holder. This number may be called the book inventory number or the book serial number, but it is an unambiguous and unique number, nine characters or fewer.

2.2 The use of the book inventory number as the passport number is recommended in the Standard Security Practices for Travel Documents, Annex 1 to Section 3 of the fifth edition of ICAO Doc 9303, Part 1.

2.3 A second method is to derive the passport number from a separate roster of numbers having value to the issuing authority. In one such case, the passport application may be given a tracking number, which is then adopted as the passport number assigned to the holder.

2.4 This practice may have national value, particularly if the assigned number is coded in some way, but often the connection between the original book number and the assigned passport number is lost or not readily made when there is an inquiry from the proper authorities.

2.5 One remedy to establish this connection would be for States using this practice to put the actual book inventory number in the machine readable zone in the optional area. However, many States are already using this optional area for other uses, and to suggest that a forger would voluntarily put in the book inventory number of a stolen book is not likely.

2.6 A third method is to derive the passport number from the national identification number of the person. In this case the person has one passport number for life, with distinction made between the passports based on issuance or expiry dates.

2.7 This practice is the worst of the three, as any roster of stolen books may contain numbers that are reused by certain issuing authorities. This causes confusion among security officers, who often may not have access to the national database, which would differentiate between the book that was stolen, and its replacement of the same number. It also pollutes the international databases tracking lost/stolen passports.

2.8 Further is the inconvenience to the traveler, who bears a replacement book with a passport number that has been reported as stolen. They will be referred to secondary examination more often, may be arrested, and probably will even have trouble cashing travelers checks.

3. ACTION BY THE TAG/MRTD

3.1 The TAG-MRTD is invited to respond to these considerations by establishing a recommended practice that:

Machine Readable Passports should not be issued using the unique personal identifier used by states as their National ID number. Passport numbers should be the inventory control number applied to the book by its book manufacturer.