FACILITATION (FAL) DIVISION — TWELFTH SESSION

Cairo, Egypt, 22 March to 2 April 2004

Agenda Item 2: **Facilitation and security of travel documents and border control formalities**
    2.4: **Advance passenger information (API)**

ADVANCE PASSENGER INFORMATION (API)

(Presented by the Secretariat)

SUMMARY
API systems, in the several States where they have been introduced, have been quite successful both as a measure to facilitate clearance of passengers and as a tool for enhancing the effectiveness of border inspection systems. In the light of recent events which have had the effect of boosting the level of interest in exploring API as a security measure, this paper examines the related facilitation issues and seeks to encourage Contracting States to review and update ICAO policy and doctrine.

1. **INTRODUCTION**

1.1   ICAO interest in API systems stems from the Chicago Convention's mandates that Contracting States prevent unnecessary delays by facilitating border clearance formalities and that they adopt internationally standard customs and immigration procedures.[1] Moreover, recent events have demonstrated that national programmes of travel document issuance and security, and the efficacy of inspection systems in controlling smuggling and illegal migration, can have a significant effect on the security of civil aviation.

1.2   Conversely, the application of technology and modern management science to control systems, in order to facilitate the flow of traffic, is increasingly important in the present climate of intensified security controls. Increased congestion and lengthened processing times caused by the sudden imposition of unfamiliar procedures can be counterproductive to security, as the confusion and disorder that result can be exploited by those seeking to evade inspection.

1.3   A proposal for "advance passenger identification" was first introduced in ICAO during the Tenth Session of the Facilitation Division (FAL/10) in 1988. By 1995 API programmes had become

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[1] Article 22, *Facilitation of formalities* and Article 23, *Customs and immigration procedures*.

operational in three States, and a new Recommended Practice was adopted by FAL/11. The latest text of this provision, as published in the Eleventh Edition of Annex 9, reads as follows:

> 3.34   **Recommended Practice.**— *Where appropriate, Contracting States should introduce a system of advance passenger information which involves the capture of certain passport or visa details prior to departure, the transmission of the details by electronic means to their public authorities, and the analysis of such data for risk management purposes prior to arrival in order to expedite clearance. To minimize handling time during check-in, document reading devices should be used to capture the information in machine readable travel documents. When specifying the identifying information on passengers to be transmitted, Contracting States should only require information that is found in the machine readable zones of passports and visas that comply with the specifications contained in Doc 9303 (series),* Machine Readable Travel Documents. *All information required should conform to specifications for UN/EDIFACT PAXLST message formats.*

2.   DEVELOPMENT OF GUIDELINES

2.1   The concept of API was first developed to meet the needs of the customs services of certain States, in order to address problems of drug trafficking and other threats to national security. Due to the heavy involvement of the airline industry, particularly in the transmission of data, the World Customs Organization (WCO) in collaboration with the International Air Transport Association (IATA) developed a set of guidelines for Customs administrations on the technical aspects of API, the operational costs and benefits, as well as the factors relevant to planning an API system. The guidelines intended to help administrations to place API into the context of the full range of facilitation measures which ought to be employed by States in a passenger processing strategy. ICAO participated in the development of the original guidelines document, which includes the specifications for machine readable passports, Doc 9303. This document was reviewed and updated by the WCO with input from ICAO and IATA in 2002.

3.   CONSIDERATION BY THE FACILITATION PANEL

3.1   At its fourth meeting, 2-5 April 2002, the Facilitation Panel considered recent developments related to API and the possible revision of the existing Recommended Practice in Annex 9 and ICAO guidance material addressing this matter. The preliminary result of the Panel's deliberations was a recommendation that implementation of API systems remain optional for States, but for those which have elected or might elect such a option, adherence to the data elements and message format of the PAXLST message should be mandatory. The latter is considered essential to global interoperability and the prospective interconnection of API systems among participating States.

3.2   In addition, the Panel concluded that the value of API is primarily in its use as a facilitation measure, although it is acknowledged that as a facility for identifying possible problem cases in advance of arrival, it does enhance overall security. Security may be the motivation for a government to spend resources to improve inspection processes, but security is not readily measurable.   Instead, the API programme's success can and should be measured by the increase in operational efficiency and reduction in airport congestion which are achieved.

3.3   Moreover, API is deemed to be a valuable tool, an integral part of a system of border management, but it is not meant to be a total system that can do everything. Other measures, under development in ICAO, to enhance efficiency and effectiveness include widespread adoption of machine readable passports and visas worldwide, development of electronic visas, identity confirmation with biometrics, and migration to automated entry/exit records to replace embarkation/disembarkation cards. These measures, while connected with API, are not intended to be subsumed in API.

3.4   In conclusion the Panel agreed to the following specific recommendations related to development of ICAO guidance on API:

a)   ICAO guidance should explore the opportunities for using API in applications for immigration, quarantine and aviation security (AVSEC) as well as customs;

b)   API should be part of a total system approach to border management, encompassing the issuance of machine readable passports and visas including electronic visas, migration to automated entry/exit records to replace embarkation/disembarkation cards, and interoperability with the API systems of other participating States; and

c)   the ICAO position should emphasize the facilitation objectives of API and measure the programme's success by the increase in operational efficiency and reduction in airport congestion which are achieved.

4.   ICAO INPUT TO THE API GUIDELINES

4.1   In the context of the above considerations against a backdrop of new initiatives by various States to implement or modify their own API systems, ICAO expressed concerns to the WCO about the tendency of administrations to deviate from agreed standards. In particular, the proliferation of data requirements by individual States beyond those provided in the original Guidelines document is believed to be detrimental to the viability of API as an internationally standard system. Specifically, elements which cannot be captured electronically from the airline's information system or from the machine readable zone (MRZ) of a travel document will add unnecessarily to the costs of operating the system. Especially problematic are those proposed elements which are not available in any official document, the collection of which will substantially diminish any facilitation benefits which may have been gained previously. For example, "country of residence" and "complete address" are subjective and not verifiable, even by the passenger in some cases. Manual capture of these data elements, presumably on the basis of oral input from the passenger, would increase the time required for check-in to an unacceptable level.

4.2   The burden of manually collecting the additional data elements, the resulting delays and the system problems stemming from the expanded processing load, are likely to result in a backlash against API and may well discourage other countries from implementing it. At best, overloading the API specifications will be counterproductive to promotion efforts, as the implementation costs will become unacceptable. In an international community in which standards are dependent on consensus and successful operations require willing partners, system requirements must be kept simple in order for results to be achievable.

4.3   It should not be assumed that API might be made into a self-sufficient security system by simply increasing the volume of data to be exchanged or by structuring it to provide *in advance* all the data which might be examined in the inspection process. In the interests of the continued success and expansion of API worldwide, it is strongly recommended that the data requirements continue to be confined to information which can be captured from machine readable travel documents or accessed from other information systems without resorting to manual procedures.

4.4   It is recognized that a global messaging agreement on API must take into account the diverse legislative requirements of the interested States. However, this does not mean that all countries should necessarily have to incorporate all of those requirements in their respective national implementations of the system. For purposes of determining the international specification, the core, mandatory data should encompass the minimum number of elements necessary to identify the passenger, his travel document, and the flight or voyage.

4.5   Although UN/EDIFACT syntax is acknowledged as a practical means of exchanging API data among participating carriers and States at the present time, the use of XML-based data formatting and modern communications technologies such as the Internet, PC-based systems and wireless devices should be investigated as alternative strategies for global interchange. Any possibilities for designing simpler systems should also be explored.

4.6   Finally, ICAO recommended that future configurations of API-based border control systems should include the deployment of biometric technology to assist with identification and identity confirmation of passengers.

5.   ACTION BY THE DIVISION

5.1   The Division is invited to adopt the following recommendations:

Recommendation A-xxx —

It is recommended that Recommended Practice 3.34 be amended and a new Standard introduced to read as follows:

3.34 **Recommended Practice.**— *Where appropriate, Contracting States should introduce a system of advance passenger information which involves the capture of certain passport or visa details prior to departure, the transmission of the details by electronic means to their public authorities, and the analysis of such data for risk management purposes prior to arrival in order to expedite clearance. To minimize handling time during check-in, document reading devices should be used to capture the information in machine readable travel documents. When specifying the identifying information on passengers to be transmitted, Contracting States should only require information that is found in the machine readable zones of passports and visas that comply with the specifications contained in Doc 9303 (series),* Machine Readable Travel Documents. *All information required should conform to specifications for UN/EDIFACT PAXLST message formats.*

3.34.1   When specifying the identifying information on passengers to be transmitted, Contracting States shall require only data elements that are available in machine readable form in travel documents conforming to the specifications contained in Doc 9303 (series), *Machine Readable Travel Documents.* All information required shall conform to specifications for UN/EDIFACT PAXLST message formats.

Recommendation B-xxx —

Contracting States planning new or enhanced API systems are urged to harmonize their data requirements within the framework of standard data sets established jointly by ICAO, WCO and IATA, in the interests of global interoperability.

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