



**OPENING STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE  
INTERNATIONAL CIVIL AVIATION ORGANIZATION (ICAO),  
DR. TAÏEB CHÉRIF,  
TO THE 2<sup>ND</sup> MRTD SYMPOSIUM**

(Montreal, 6-8 September)

Good morning ladies and gentlemen.

On behalf of ICAO, I would like to extend to all of you a warm welcome to this Second Symposium on MRTDs, biometrics and security. Our objective is to bring you up to date on the progress made by ICAO and its industry partners over the past year in the many aspects of travel document issuance and inspection applications. We will also mark the coming to fruition of several initiatives that twelve months ago were still in the planning stages or just beginning to emerge.

Historically, ICAO has been publishing specifications for machine readable passports, visas and other MRTDs in Doc 9303 for some 26 years now. Throughout this period, we have continually updated and improved the specifications in light of technological advancements in all aspects of travel document security. Just recently, we published specifications for ePassports, culminating thousands of hours of technical work and consultation on the part of experts in our Technical Advisory Group and ISO – the International Organization for Standardization. Over the next few days, a number of speakers will elaborate on this milestone achievement and show how the ePassport, which about 40 States plan to issue by the end of 2007, represents the beginning of a global revolution in the issuance of travel documents and systems for the inspection of people.

Yet our work doesn't stop with the issuance and updating of standards for MRTDs. At every level of the Organization, we are just as committed to supporting their implementation, in a globally harmonized manner.

In its last two Sessions, the ICAO Assembly representing 189 Member States renewed its Resolution on passport security and urged continuation of this essential work as a matter of high priority.

For their part, the Council and its Air Transport Committee, as governing bodies for the MRTD programme, approved the ICAO Blueprint on biometrics in 2003 and, last year, approved the establishment of the ICAO Public Key Directory.

As for the Secretariat of the Organization, it has taken definitive steps to promote MRTD standards and assist Member States with implementation through a variety of activities – speeches by myself and senior management all over the world, public information initiatives, a dedicated section on our web site, the new MRTD Report magazine, regional seminars, technical assistance projects, and this Symposium. On a daily basis, we interact with Member States and sister organizations to discuss issues and provide the assistance required.

During this meeting, we will focus our attention on the advent of the ePassport. I must emphasize, however, that this in no way diminishes the importance of the conventional Machine Readable Passport. The MRP will continue to be the baseline for secure travel documents. The vast majority of States already issue them and for those that need help to meet the prescribed deadline of April 2010, ICAO stands ready to:

- offer technical and policy guidance
- provide advice to the tender process
- facilitate financing arrangements
- manage a project, and/or
- perform quality checks on prototype documents.

The ongoing support of many States and other donors, in terms of expertise and financial assistance, is also contributing to meeting the overall objective.

The next few days should provide much insight into knowledge and tools to upgrade your countries' international travel documents and move the global project forward. This high-level sharing of information includes the exhibition, located just outside the Assembly Hall, where exhibitors are eager to apprise you of state-of-the-art products and services that are the “nuts and bolts” of MRTDs and inspection systems. I encourage you to take full advantage of their presence here with us and explore ways and means of making your MRTD programme a success.

I commend your participation in this most important endeavour and wish you a very productive Symposium.

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