

ICAO Regional Seminar on MRTDs, Biometrics
and Security Standards
Maputo, Mozambique 24-26 November 2010

Opening Remarks

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Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. It is a pleasure for me to welcome so many senior government officials and industry representatives to this ICAO Regional Seminar on MRTDs and Biometrics for Africa and the Middle East.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our hosts, the Government of Mozambique – and especially the Civil Aviation Authority of Mozambique – which provided enormous assistance and support in organizing this important regional event.

This year marks the thirtieth anniversary of publication of ICAO Document 9303, the ‘body of knowledge’ that outlines specifications for machine-readable passports, visas and ID cards, including biometric travel documents. The first edition described the basic principles of a machine-readable passport, while today’s Document 9303 is comprised of three comprehensive parts that elaborate on the state-of-the-art technical specifications. This all-important document will continue to expand and evolve in response to future needs.

With this major accomplishment behind us, how do we maximize the usefulness of the ICAO MRTD Programme and ensure its continued relevance? In recent times, the Programme's focus has been shifting increasingly to security and to MRTD capacity-building needs. Over the next few minutes, I shall address both of these priorities.

Very often we are asked whether the MRTD Programme is part of ICAO's facilitation work. At its inception, the emphasis was indeed on passenger facilitation. Air traffic was surging and the immediate concern was how to carry out border formalities more quickly and economically, in order not to hinder civil aviation operations. It was only logical that the early MRTD-related Standards and Recommended Practices were incorporated in Annex 9 – *Facilitation*, as is still the case.

Things changed fundamentally after 9/11, however. The facilitation agenda remains relevant and important, but in today's global security environment, the main focus of the Programme includes combating terrorism and transborder crime by enhancing border security.

A case in point is the attempted sabotage of Northwest Flight 253 on 25 December 2009. While the aviation security screening measures were performed according to the book, this defence alone could not prevent the in-flight attack. To prevent such incidents, we require

passenger screening measures combined with effective use of intelligence and reliable identity management. While passenger screening certainly has a role to play, it remains just one layer of defence, and on occasion this is not sufficient to ensure security.

While the “security of the future” is likely to be more comprehensive, with numerous security layers reinforcing each other, there is no need to reinvent the wheel. Border security and law enforcement have been intelligence-led for decades, relying heavily on information collection, analysis and timely dissemination to front-line officers. It may be feasible to integrate border security best practices with the aviation security process, enhancing both.

In this context, I should like to highlight the importance of the ICAO Assembly that concluded just over a month ago, when Member States unanimously adopted a Declaration on Aviation Security. The Declaration urges States to reaffirm their commitment to security and to engage in greater international cooperation when addressing complex and evolving threats to aircraft and air transport systems.

Particularly relevant to our Seminar is the emphasis placed by the Declaration on travel document security, identity management and data sharing as vital components of an effective security strategy. The Declaration calls, for example, for intensified and expanded use of the ICAO Public Key Directory and INTERPOL’s Stolen and Lost Travel

Document Database in combating identity fraud. It also calls for more intelligent aviation security processes in terms of information collection, analysis and timely data sharing among and between agencies and States. States are encouraged to share their expertise and apply best practices to strengthen travel document security and improve fraud detection.

With regard to MRTD implementation, there has been a growing demand for capacity-building assistance. Current MRTD specifications are quite elaborate, and a number of less developed States find it difficult to comply with the ICAO requirements. This is caused mainly by the lack of technical expertise, shortage of funds, or often both.

Such capacity shortfalls prevent the universal implementation of MRTDs and compromise their effectiveness. The answer is to instil closer dialogue with States that need assistance, intensify liaison with donor agencies, and expand capacity-building measures. ICAO is currently exploring ways to better help States build their MRTD implementation capacity.

On this note, the focus of the last half day of the Regional Seminar is particularly pertinent, since it will be dedicated to a round-table discussion and workshop about remaining capacity gaps in the region. The workshop will also examine how ICAO might intensify its

technical assistance by providing expertise and mobilizing donor funding.

We are privileged to have among us Mr. David Philp, the Chair of the Implementation and Capacity-Building Working Group of the ICAO Technical Advisory Group on MRTDs, who will facilitate the capacity-building workshop. Established two years ago, the Working Group has gained momentum and is expanding its activities in project development and implementation. It has become an effective international intermediary that increasingly matches the needs of States with available technical expertise and donor funding. I encourage Seminar participants to discuss and identify capacity gaps in their passport, visa, ID card and other border security issues. This will assist ICAO and our partner organizations in initiating future capacity-building projects in the region.

Again, I sincerely thank you for having taken the time to join us here this week, and I wish you all a very engaging and successful Regional Seminar.

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