

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

(Montreal, 12 to 15 September 2011)

**Opening Remarks**

**Mrs. Folasade Odutola, Director, Air Transport Bureau, ICAO**

It is a great pleasure and privilege to address this distinguished audience and to also welcome you to the 7<sup>th</sup> ICAO Symposium on MRTDs, Biometrics and Security Standards.

My distinguished colleague who just spoke made a strong case about the need to intensify ongoing global efforts in building capacity to combat terrorism and transborder crime more effectively. Ambassador Francisco Jose Madeira of the African Union specifically reminded us of particularly serious challenges on the African continent, that are being addressed in spite of significant financial constraints.

This economic issue raises a fundamental question: How can we ensure that ICAO MRTD specifications are implemented worldwide, in an integrated manner, thus maximizing their security and facilitation benefits?

A State that has not implemented current MRTD standards presents a weakness in the global security net. A single failure can compromise the global travel document and border security regime.

So let's take a closer look at why non-compliance with ICAO MRTD standards still exists.

Current ICAO MRTD specifications reflect operating conditions and facilities found in the most developed States. Less developed States often struggle to implement these same complex specifications because they lack technical expertise or funds, or both. Filling such capacity gaps require meaningful dialogue among States, intensified liaison with donor agencies and better access to capacity-building programmes.

On the other hand, money is not always the problem and MRTD implementation challenges are not limited to developing States. According to the ICAO MRTD Implementation and Capacity Building Working Group, perhaps as many as half of the States issuing ePassports fully comply with ICAO specifications and take full advantage of the ICAO Public Key Directory. Even some of the most advanced States experience difficulty implementing ICAO MRTD specifications.

Still, the problem is more acute in developing States. During a recent MRTD workshop in Maputo, Mozambique, the message was loud and clear: capacity-building needs are enormous, and Member States look forward to a better and more effective mechanism for mobilizing technical assistance in travel document and border security.

It is true that technical cooperation and development issues are not unique to the travel document and border security world. They have been at the top of the international agenda for years.

Mr. Kofi Annan, while UN Secretary-General, put it this way: “We will not enjoy security without development, we will not enjoy development without security, and we will not enjoy either without respect for human rights.”

This thought-provoking statement highlights the nexus between security and international development, and impresses upon us the need to boldly contemplate new ways of providing technical assistance to States in need.

It is also a powerful reminder that border security does not exist in a vacuum and is not simply an isolated technical matter in some distant land. In this interconnected world, a breach of security on the other side of the planet may just as well be next door.

Increased and more effective capacity-building assistance is a prerequisite for increased security. Weaknesses in travel document security constitute a global security challenge and States must adjust their international development efforts to address it in a proactive manner. They must address it with political will and a strong commitment to action.

As the Secretary General alluded to in his opening remarks, ICAO is adopting a more proactive stance in providing assistance to Member States. As the recognized global forum for international civil aviation, it brings together States in need, donors and implementation agencies. It is also exploring new and better ways for States to build their MRTD and border security capacity.

During this Symposium, a dedicated panel will provide the context for lively discussions on this new MRTD Strategy. I invite you to make the most of it – your views will be very much appreciated.

To make progress, it is important for States requiring assistance to inform us of their needs. Only in this way can we link those in need with governments that have international development and security funds available. At the same time, international agencies involved in technical cooperation and capacity building in the travel document and border security sectors must let us know of their interest in working together to further our joint travel document and border security agenda.

ICAO will do its share. The MRTD Implementation and Capacity-Building Working Group and ICAO's Technical Co-operation Bureau stand ready to intensify their role in greater MRTD capacity building worldwide.

I join my fellow speakers in sincerely thanking you for having taken the time to join us here, and I wish you a very successful and productive MRTD Symposium.

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