

**Regional Seminar on MRTDs, Biometrics and Identification Management,
9-11 July 2013, Philipsburg, Sint Maarten, Dutch West Indies**

Opening Remarks

Mr. Mauricio Siciliano, MRTD Officer, ICAO

Prime Minister,

Dear colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Secretary General of ICAO, Mr. Raymond Benjamin, I am delighted to welcome you all to this Regional Seminar on MRTDs and Biometrics for the Americas Region.

This seminar has been organized by ICAO, with the support of the Government of Sint Maarten. Our generous hosts have put every effort to make this seminar a success. In particular, our Sint Maarten colleagues contributed with good ideas how to make the Seminar innovative and relevant to the needs of the region.

Differently from most MRTD Regional Seminars in the past, this event is about MRTDs – but not *just* about MRTDs. Our Seminar will focus on something even more essential: the need for a robust national identification management system. Our presentations and discussions will explore key components of identification management, including the role of civil registries, evidence of identification, social footprint, and much more.

Solid and reliable identification management is the rock foundation on which travel document security and effective border controls are build. We will move on to explore the implementation of ICAO MRTD specifications, Standards and Recommended Practices.

The redefined focus of our Seminar is not accidental. It is aligned with new policy developments at ICAO. Allow me to give you a quick overview of some of the challenges and issues that ICAO has been addressing. This broader context will highlight the importance of MRTD Regional Seminars as ours, and will help to frame its scope and agenda.

2013 is a defining year to the MRTD programme and the global traveller identification community. The proposed ICAO Traveller Identification Programme (ICAO TRIP) Strategy, already endorsed by the Council, will be presented to the ICAO Assembly in Autumn. The Strategy, responding to the global driving forces and needs of Member States, provides a framework for achieving the maximum benefits of travel documents in the future. It brings together the elements of identification management and builds on ICAO leadership in matters related to Machine Readable Travel Documents.

The key point of the ICAO TRIP Strategy is a recognized need for a holistic and integrated approach to traveller identification management. The approach that links the five elements of traveller identification and border controls into a coherent framework: evidence of identification, document issuance and control, MRTDs, inspection systems and tools, and interoperable applications.

ICAO recognizes the benefits of traveller identification management to aviation security and facilitation. ICAO's mission is to contribute to the capacity of Member States to uniquely identify individuals by providing tools and knowledge to establish and confirm the identity of travellers.

Historically, the ICAO MRTD programme started as a subset of the Facilitation programme, aimed at producing global specifications for inter-operable travel documents. This aim has already been achieved. Now we are moving to explore how the MRTD programme – with all the trust and credibility it has generated - could contribute further to the global efforts of enhancing security through effective identification management.

This Seminar's programme addresses those complex challenges directly. It covers the existing ICAO MRTD standards and specifications as well as emerging technologies. It addresses in depth the broader identification management framework, challenges and good practices.

I am pleased to say that the speakers and representatives drawn from ICAO working groups, ICAO Headquarters in Montreal and regional and international organizations are top experts in their field. Please make the most of our Seminar: ask questions, share your challenges and experiences, and contribute with your knowledge to the discussions.

In closing I would like to take this opportunity to thank our generous hosts, the Government of Sint Maarten, which provided enormous assistance and support in organizing this important regional event.

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.

— END —