Remarks by the ICAO ESAF Office Regional Director
Mr. Meshesha Belayneh

Representative of the Zimbabwe government (*Guest of Honour*)
Hon Minister (*if present*)
General Manager/Chief Executive Officer, Zimbabwe Civil Aviation Authority
CEOs of Civil Aviation Authorities, Airlines, Airports and Service Provider Entities;
Representatives of International Organizations;
Distinguished Guests;
Ladies and Gentlemen;

On behalf of the President of the ICAO Council, Mr. Roberto Kobeh Gonzales, the Secretary General of ICAO, Mr. Raymond Benjamin, and on my own behalf, I welcome you all to this Regional Seminar on Machine Readable Travel Documents, (MRTDs), Biometrics and Security Standards, being held here at Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe for the next three days.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as you are aware, this seminar has been organized by ICAO, with the support of the Civil Aviation Authority of Zimbabwe to address current and emerging ICAO MRTD specifications, identity management practices and related border security issues with particular reference to the African region.

The seminar programme focusses on the advantages and challenges of using biometric data in travel documents, points of importance with regard to implementing electronic passports, MRTDs procurement issues, reading travel documents at the borders and the role of the ICAO Public Key Directory (PKD) in achieving robust global security.

Dear Colleagues, on a broader perspective, the recent High Level Conference on Aviation Security held in Montreal, Canada, in September 2012, which was attended by various national security agencies, encouraged ICAO Member States to enhance aviation security by standardizing formats for travel documents and to adopt electronic transmission of passenger data while ensuring the protection of passengers' privacy and civil liberties. States were also encouraged to participate in the electronic passport validation service known as the ICAO Public Key Directory (PKD).

I would encourage you to take advantage of the experts who are present here to critically examine the reasons why implementation of MRTDs and e-passports remain a big challenge to a number of developing States. It is often stated that the challenges are related to lack of technical expertise and inadequate funding. However, these challenges can be overcome, to a large extent, depending on the approach adopted by Member States.

Ladies and Gentlemen, some other areas of aviation security you may wish to give attention to during your deliberations include the following:

1) The possibility and practicability of having all non-MRTDs out of circulation by 24 November 2015;

2) Weaknesses in the overall identity management system, including civil registries;

3) Weak security features of breeder documents like birth certificates, national identity cards;

4) Weakness in the passport issuance process, including manual procedures;

5) Lack of standard watch list to assist in tracking fraudsters;

6) Inadequate training for immigration and passport officials;

7) Volume of MRTDs and e-passports in circulation.

Ladies and Gentlemen, aviation security, including border security controls is a major priority area for ICAO and as such implementation and assistance to States has gained considerable momentum in the recent past. My Colleagues from ICAO will explore with you the current global capacity gaps and challenges; look into the present and future of ICAO's technical assistance related to MRTDs and border controls; and reflect on the prospects and priorities of enhancing capacity building assistance to Member States.

Our collaborative approach with industry players and State authorities would provide solutions for enhancing global civil aviation security while at the same time improving the efficiency of aviation operations.

In closing, I would like to take this opportunity to thank our generous host, the Government of Zimbabwe, for providing enormous assistance and support in organizing this important Regional event.

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