

**Regional Seminar on MRTDs and Traveller Identification Management,
Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 8–10 April 2014**

Opening Remarks

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Excellencies

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 and Exhibition on Machine Readable Travel Documents (MRTDs) and Traveller Identification Management for Central Asia and Eastern Europe.

This seminar has been organized by ICAO, with the generous support of the Government of Uzbekistan. Our hosts have put every effort to make this seminar a success. I also wish to highlight the close collaboration of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). The OSCE, being a regional platform for information exchange and technical assistance, provided valuable support in organizing the Seminar. I would like to highlight that ICAO and the OSCE are currently exploring means to join forces to enhance cooperation, for the benefit of States.

Let me start with major policy developments that shape ICAO's work related to travel documents and their relevance to aviation. The year 2013 was a defining year for the MRTD Programme and the global traveller identification community. The ICAO Traveller Identification Programme Strategy – known in short as the ICAO TRIP – was approved by the ICAO Council and endorsed by the 38th Session of ICAO Assembly last Autumn.

The Strategy responds to the needs and expectations of ICAO Member States, and provides a comprehensive framework for achieving the maximum benefits of travel documents in the future. It brings together all elements of identification management, while building 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. An approach that links the five elements of traveller identification and border controls into a coherent framework. An approach that contributes to States' capacity to uniquely identify individuals by providing authorities with tools and guidance for establishing and verifying the identity of travellers.

ICAO recognizes the benefits of traveller identification management to aviation security and facilitation. This Seminar provides an excellent opportunity for examining various components of the ICAO TRIP Strategy and discussing the ways of its implementation.

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 been already achieved. Now we are moving to greater challenges. We explore how the ICAO TRIP Strategy – relying on all the trust and credibility the MRTD Programme has generated - can contribute further to the global efforts of enhancing security and aviation growth through effective identification management.

Having a good policy is vital but it is the implementation of the TRIP Strategy that is of greatest importance. ICAO recognizes that the global framework of policies, Standards and specifications creates high expectations for the performance of States in all matters related to travel documents and identification management. ICAO recognizes that some States struggle with the implementation of Annex 9 Standards and Recommended Practices, as well as with the implementation of MRTD specifications, specifically in this region. This calls for intensifying capacity building assistance efforts, intensifying technical dialogue with States in need and regional partners, and mobilizing assistance from the donor community.

ICAO has made important strides to assist through capacity-building and technical assistance projects. This Seminar is a great opportunity to discuss challenges you may be facing and explore options for ICAO assistance in the future. The final session of the Seminar focuses on enhancing regional cooperation and further capacity-building support in Central Asia. Please take advantage of this session: share the challenges that you may face in order for international organizations and donor programmes to identify areas where assistance is needed the most.

I encourage States present here to maintain a dialogue with ICAO about their current and newly-emerging traveller identification challenges. The more we know about your needs, the better placed ICAO will be to develop effective technical assistance strategies, tools and projects. Our close cooperation and ongoing technical dialogue are key to success.

I am also pleased to say that Seminar speakers and facilitators - drawn from ICAO working groups and partner international organizations - are top experts in their field. Special thanks are due to government and industry experts that make up the ICAO Technical Advisory Group on Machine Readable Travel Documents (TAG/MRTD). I invite you all to make the most of this Seminar and the expertise available here. Ask questions, share your challenges and experiences, question established views, and contribute your knowledge, experience and insights.

This Seminar is complemented by an industry exhibition with a broad range of products and services related to MRTDs, biometric identification, travel document security applications and border inspection systems. I would like to thank the exhibitors present during the Seminar, and I encourage participants to interact with ICAO industry partners and experts to discuss the latest available traveller identification technologies and services.

In closing I would like to thank our generous hosts, the Government of Uzbekistan, who provided enormous assistance and support in organizing this important regional event. Special thanks are due to our OSCE partners who enhanced the scope and relevance of the programme, and coordinated the organization of the event and facilitated the participation of State officials from the region.

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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