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Morocco, International Organizations and IAEA Member States Conclude Successful Test Emergency Response to Dirty Bomb Attack

MONTREAL, 22 November 2013 – Tensions ran high in emergency operations centres in 58 States and 10 international organizations during the past two days, as the latest ConvEx-3 nuclear and radiological emergency response exercise, code named ‘Bab Al Maghrib’, put current international response and coordination planning to the test with a series of simulated dirty bomb attacks.

The simulated explosions took place in the port of Tangier Med and Marrakech medina in Morocco and triggered a series of ‘actual’, ‘potential’ and ‘perceived’ implications for the participating governments and responding international organizations, including the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

Issues addressed during the exercise surrounded a hypothetical radioactive release into the atmosphere, medical responses and public health, security, transparent public communications, as well as industry, tourism and commerce activities relating to the import and export of goods. Though the lessons emerging from ‘Bab Al Maghrib’ are particularly associated with simulated dirty bomb explosions, many are also applicable to other types of nuclear and radiological emergencies.

“Bab Al Maghrib provided an excellent opportunity to review ICAO’s standing procedures and responsibilities with respect to coordinating an emergency response to an international nuclear and radiological event,” commented the Organization’s Secretary General, Raymond Benjamin. “We will be making a fuller assessment over the coming weeks and ICAO looks forward to sharing the results of this analysis with the IAEA and the many States and international partnering organizations who helped make this year’s ConvEx-3 exercise such a success.”

Immediate conclusions drawn included acknowledgement that collaboration on behalf of security and safety authorities in States needs to be improved, and that communication with the public has to be transparent, objective and easily understandable while protecting sensitive information – a challenging balance.

In the coming weeks, feedback from participating Member States and international organizations will be compiled by the IAEA and become part of a comprehensive report to be used to strengthen national and international preparedness to respond to similar emergencies.

A specialized agency of the United Nations, ICAO was created in 1944 to promote the safe and orderly development of international civil aviation throughout the world. It sets standards and regulations necessary for aviation safety, security, efficiency, capacity and environmental protection, amongst many other priorities. The Organization serves as the forum for cooperation in all fields of civil aviation among its 191 Member States.

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