Address by the Secretary General of ICAO

Mr. Raymond Benjamin

to the
Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Aviation Security

(Tokyo, 13 March 2010)

1. I wish to thank the Japanese authorities for having organized this very important event and for providing me with the opportunity to address you on behalf of the International Civil Aviation Organization.

2. This Ministerial Conference is part of a series of meetings in various parts of the world designed to generate global consensus around the development of a uniform, international response to the attempted bombing of Northwest Flight 253 on 25 December 2009, as well as to other potential threats to civil aviation.

3. We are on the right track. About a month ago, I attended a regional summit in Mexico where participating States and ICAO issued a joint declaration on strengthening aviation security. I am confident that States of the Asia-Pacific region will likewise show their concrete support for effective and globally-harmonized action.

4. The response may take the form of a resolution before the ICAO Assembly this fall and possibly the convening later on of a high-level worldwide conference on aviation security. Whatever strategy is adopted, it must demonstrate our unshakable determination to provide air travellers everywhere with the highest levels of aviation security possible.

5. While public confidence remains high I'm sure, the 25 December incident reminded us quite dramatically that commercial flights will long remain a favourite target of terrorists. The disruptive impact of even an unsuccessful attack on the international air transport system should reinforce our resolve to address this problem on a priority and collective basis.

6. Obviously, it is a huge undertaking. Year in and year out, some 2.5 billion passengers take to the air and each one of them must be screened. Moreover, methods used by terrorists are increasingly sophisticated. They only have to succeed once in a while to destabilize the system, whereas we must be right all of the time, consistently, everywhere. And terrorist activities stretch beyond borders – they can start in one country while their intended target may be half way around the world. Finally, so as not to overly affect operations, we must constantly strike a balance between the effectiveness of security measures and the need to facilitate the efficient flow of passengers through airport terminals.

7. Since the events of 11 September, we have tried to limit the number and scope of acts of unlawful interference against civil aviation equipment and facilities. On the other hand, events like the August 2006 plot to destroy flights over the North Atlantic using liquids as explosives, and the one on 25 December, raise the prospect of still more different types of security threats.

8.　　When major breaches in security occur, emergency measures are absolutely necessary. I take this opportunity to commend decision makers who impose more stringent security procedures when required despite their unpopularity with passengers and operators, and the resultant negative media reports. The emergency procedures implemented in the wake of 25 December, which included increased gate screening for U.S.-bound flights and passenger profiling, were totally commensurate with the level of threat. In addition, according to U.S. intelligence information, the attempted sabotage of Northwest Flight 253 was not an isolated case, but part of a wider threat to international civil aviation.

9.　　 Emergency measures are problematic, however, because they are onerous and unsustainable over the long term. This is where we step in. As the United Nations Agency responsible for promoting the safe and efficient development of international civil aviation, ICAO is coordinating the development of practical responses to the latest threat and those like it, as well as an overall long-term strategy, in a proactive and consensual manner.

10.　　With regards to 25 December, the ICAO Aviation Security Panel meeting at the end of this month is expected to produce concrete recommendations on how best to deal with this particular type of threat. In responding to the incident, it will be necessary to consider both procedural and technological solutions to this security gap, including the possible use of imaging technology – commonly referred to as body scanners – as one means of screening passengers, taking into account privacy, data protection and health issues.

11.　　The concern is that every time a new type of incident arises, we introduce yet another layer of security. To do so without overburdening the industry, we must concurrently evaluate existing measures, eliminating and revising provisions as required. For the longer term, our challenge is to identify practical alternative measures that provide the same level of enhanced security.

12.　　Hand in hand with development of efficient and effective countermeasures is a need to improve how we collect, manage and share security-related information, an essential component in the fight against terrorism. This is a very delicate issue. The sharing of sensitive information between States or with other legitimate parties must be totally secure and this requires the establishment of a globally acceptable mechanism for that purpose. Because of its experience in data collection and management, a viable option would be to entrust ICAO with the responsibility of developing a process for securely compiling data and making it available to States and recognised parties. ICAO would certainly welcome such a complementary activity to its evolving aviation security programme.

13.　　In the more immediate timeframe, States should focus on adopting and implementing standardized requirements for existing passenger data exchange programmes. These include the Advance Passenger Information and Passenger Name Record data schemes, more popularly known as API and PNR. In support of efforts by States in this area, ICAO's Facilitation Panel is currently looking at ways and means of improving ICAO's guidelines on PNR. In cooperation with the World Customs Organization (WCO) and the International Air Transport Association (IATA), ICAO has begun updating the international guidelines for API programmes and the transfer of passenger manifests electronically.

14.   Later this year the Facilitation Panel is expected to enhance existing international Standards on API, and possibly develop new provisions for PNR. The Panel will also be asked to look at revising existing Standards on travel document security, to close any loopholes that might exist. The objective is to strengthen the application of these data exchange programmes in the fight against terrorism.

15.   Broadly speaking, in the longer term, we may have to fully integrate the collection and use of data with existing aviation security processes. Border security, for example, relies heavily on data collection, analysis and timely dissemination of threat information to front-line officers at border points, including international airports. We could adapt border security best practices to create an intelligence-driven security approach at airports. Of course, a comprehensive intelligence-driven approach would rely heavily on effective data sharing and inter-agency cooperation at both the national and international levels.

16.   At the end of the day, effective border security is synonymous with sound identity management and travel document security. For decades now, ICAO's Machine Readable Travel Document (MRTD) Programme has been the official global reference for setting travel document norms. Given today's challenges and the requirement to make better use of passenger data, the time may have come to expand and further exploit the MRTD Programme.

17.   Another way to enhance aviation worldwide is to strengthen ICAO's Universal Security Audit Programme, or USAP. USAP was created in the wake of the events of 11 September 2001 to promote global aviation security by identifying any deficiencies in the aviation security systems of Member States and by providing recommendations for their mitigation or resolution.

18.   USAP is now well into its second cycle of audits, having completed 59 audits globally, including nine in the Asia and Pacific region. The results of these audits are focused on the level of implementation of the critical elements of an aviation security oversight system. As of 1 March 2010, the Asia and Pacific region's level of effective implementation of these critical elements was 52.6 per cent, which is above the global average. Areas of specific concern, both globally and within the region, include the implementation of effective training programmes, the provision of sufficiently detailed procedures, certification and approval obligations, and the implementation of comprehensive oversight activities addressing all areas related to aviation security.

19.   As a result of the last ICAO Assembly in 2007, we have enhanced USAP by incorporating a degree of transparency for audit results. All Member States can now view, thanks to a secure website, a graph for each audited State showing the level of effective implementation of the oversight system critical elements. Reviewing this information enables donor States to focus assistance projects on those States that are unable, for one reason or another, to correct serious security deficiencies and it is my firm belief that there is a need to further strengthen such assistance efforts.

20.   In fact, a meeting of donor States will be held in Montreal later this month to explore ways to improve coordination of assistance activities and strategically address how to fill existing gaps in aviation security. This involves closer collaboration through the ICAO mechanism for the sharing of information on assistance activities.

21.   A web-based tool that might meet this requirement for coordination, or serve as a suitable model, is the recently upgraded ICAO Database of Assistance Projects, or IDAP. The database can be used to identify complementary or overlapping activities so that donor States and stakeholders may better leverage their resources. It is designed to allow ICAO to match project partners and develop strategic project proposals. As with many data bases, its usefulness depends on the amount of information States provides and how often they use the mechanism.

22.   Another effective approach for solving security shortcomings is to address them at the regional level. You need look no further than the Asia/Pacific region to find an excellent example of regional cooperation in the field of aviation security. The Cooperative Aviation Security Programme of Asia/Pacific, better known as CASP-AP, seeks to achieve full implementation of international aviation security conventions and ICAO security provisions among its member States. Since its establishment in 2005, CASP-AP has expanded from 12 to 26 States, and has proved very successful. In conjunction with the Regional Office in Bangkok, CASP-AP member States are focused on creating a permanent regional structure for cooperation and coordination in aviation security matters. ICAO is encouraged by the Asia/Pacific experience, and supports expansion of the concept to other regions.

23.   Having said all of this, we must also review the international legal framework relating to aviation security. ICAO has been working in the past few years to update the existing aviation security conventions. This year, a Diplomatic Conference will be held in Beijing, China, from 30 August to 10 September, to amend The Hague Convention of 1970 and the Montreal Convention of 1971.

24.   Ladies and gentlemen, we have much to do to provide the travelling public with a security net that will ensure both their safety and maintain their confidence in what is by far the most efficient mode of mass transportation. And while the road ahead is challenging, we have a tremendous track record upon which to build future successes. Hence my call to you today to join us in the development of a robust, proactive response to current and future threats to the security of the global air transport system.

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