



## ASSEMBLY — 36TH SESSION

### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

#### Agenda Item 18: Passenger and crew health and the prevention of spread of communicable disease

#### PREVENTION OF SPREAD OF COMMUNICABLE DISEASE THROUGH AIR TRAVEL: A VIEW FROM ASIA

(Presented by Singapore)

##### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Singapore views with great concern the possibility of a communicable disease with pandemic potential affecting the global aviation industry. It has and will continue to commit resources and expert manpower to assist ICAO in its objective to have a harmonized response plan for the aviation sector. During the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak as well as in the current climate of a possible human pandemic of the avian influenza virus or its variant, Singapore has played a pivotal role in ICAO's efforts to effect and implement a harmonized response plan against such an eventuality. Asia was the focal area during the SARS outbreak.

Similarly, the primary foci of outbreaks of the avian flu and human cases resulting from exposure to the virus are in Asia. Through the Cooperative Arrangement for Prevention of Spread of Communicable Disease through Air Travel (CAPSCA), a number of States and administrations are working towards implementing the ICAO State Guidelines. The Aviation Medicine Expert / Project Coordinator is from Singapore and the project was successfully launched with a Seminar/Workshop/Table-top Exercise held at the Singapore Aviation Academy (SAA) in September 2006. The Aviation Medicine Expert has since evaluated a number of airports of the member States/Administrations. An area of concern is that there are States which are affected by outbreaks of the avian flu in poultry and with reported human cases of the virus which are not members of the project.

While funding has always been a problem, recently CAPSCA has received a boost in the form of funding from the Central Fund for Influenza Action, a fund administered by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) under the auspices of the United Nations Development Group Office and Dr. David Nabarro, UN System Senior Coordinator for Avian and Human Influenza. This will enable CAPSCA to not only reach out to the remaining States within Asia but also to progress the project to Africa, which is deemed to be the next region at risk.

The 1st Steering Committee Meeting (SCM) of CAPSCA was held on 30 to 31 August 2007 in Hong Kong. Future directions for CAPSCA were charted at this SCM, including the extension of the project to Africa. It was again noted that a number of States, currently affected by the avian influenza virus, had yet to join the project.

**Action:** The Assembly is invited to:

- urge States especially within the Asia Pacific and African Regions to join CAPSCA; and
- endorse the CAPSCA objective of a harmonised Pandemic Preparedness Plan for the aviation sector.

<i>Strategic Objectives:</i>	This working paper relates to Strategic Objective E –Continuity (by reducing the impact of communicable disease on the global aviation community.
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<i>Financial implications:</i>	Not applicable.
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References:	Nil.
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 In 2003, the rapid spread of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) caught many States by surprise and a primary casualty was the aviation sector. Air travel plunged and airports became relatively deserted. Singapore hosted an ICAO workshop to develop anti-SARS measures for airports, with the aim of reducing the risk of spread of the virus through air travel. This helped to restore the confidence of the travelling public and bolstered the economics of the aviation sector.

1.2 Following this, the rapid and intercontinental spread of avian influenza in 2005 was observed. Taking a proactive approach to address the impact of a possible pandemic to air travel ICAO took immediate action to develop an aviation-related preparedness plan. The convening of meetings for this purpose in Singapore was made possible by the agreement of the participating Governments to utilise their remaining funds in the Anti-SARS ICAO project. Singapore hosted two back-to-back meetings on the subject between 7 and 10 February 2006. An aviation preparedness plan was drawn up.

1.3 To carry the project forward, Cooperative Arrangement for Preventing the Spread of Communicable Diseases through Air Travel (CAPSCA) was launched in September 2006. The aim of the project is to reduce the risk of spreading influenza having pandemic potential, and similar communicable diseases, by air travellers through co-operative arrangements between the Participating States/administrations and airports.

## 2. CAPSCA

2.1 To carry the project forward, a project document was prepared by ICAO (RAS/06/801). The aim of the project is to reduce the risk of spreading influenza having pandemic potential, and similar communicable diseases, by air travellers through co-operative arrangements between the participating States/administrations and airports. This would be achieved initially by the application and implementation of ICAO guidelines for preventing the spread of communicable diseases at major international airports. An ICAO Aviation Medicine Expert, provided for the project, would then visit participating airports to assist the concerned authorities in implementing the guidelines. Personnel from the participating civil aviation and airport authorities, as well as airlines and other related aviation workers would be trained on the guidelines and the documents from which the guidelines have been derived and on implementation of preventive measures. As many States in the Asia/Pacific Region as possible would be encouraged to join the project.

2.2 ICAO State guidelines provide the basic documentation for the project. A seminar/workshop/table-top exercise was held 25 and 26 September 2006 at the Singapore Aviation Academy to launch CAPSCA. The activities of the project involve, for participating States/administrations, a review of States/administrations, airports and airlines preparedness plans to ensure that the relevant policies, training and communication procedures are in place. A harmonised approach to preparedness planning and implementation is the main goal.

2.3 During the review process, training will be provided when necessary and another important goal of the project is to establish an expert group that can provide ongoing guidance to all States/administrations in the Regions. Here, it is recognised that some States/administrations will have a greater level of knowledge and expertise in preparedness planning than others. It is by bringing together

representatives from as many States/administrations as possible, as well as from airports and airlines that sharing of information will be facilitated. In this context it is to be noted that the WHO is collaborating with ICAO so that their global alert and response experts of the SEA region can contribute to the CAPSCA agenda. This should ensure that CAPSCA initiatives will be well supported by the public health specialists/experts of the region.

#### **2.4 CAPSCA Workshop/Seminar/Table-top Exercise: 25 to 26 September 2006**

2.4.1 In order to fulfil the training requirement of CAPSCA, it was decided that the best way to accomplish this would be to gather all representatives from participating States/administrations in Singapore, rather than doing it separately for each State/administration. Thus, a Workshop cum Seminar cum table-top exercise was planned for the 25 to 26 September 2006. The core working group members who had participated in the initial guidelines compilation exercise were also invited. States/Administrations that had not joined the project were also free to join the training program. There were 25 participants from the following Organisations and States/administrations: International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), World Health Organization (WHO), CDC, United States (USA), European Civil Aviation Conference (ECAC), International Air Transport Association (IATA), Airports Council International (ACI), Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Hong Kong, Macao, Thailand, Malaysia, Philippines, Republic of Korea, New Zealand and Singapore.

2.4.2 It was heartening to note that not only did the States which had committed to participating in CAPSCA attend, other States also sent representatives, e.g. Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Philippines and New Zealand. On the other hand, despite repeated invitations, several States of potential importance in any response to an outbreak of influenza with pandemic potential, the primary disease of current concern, did not attend the workshop.

2.4.3 The first day comprised of presentations from ICAO, WHO, CDC, IATA, ACI and the FAA. On the morning of day two a table-top exercise was held. Participants had earlier been provided with a scenario depicting the developing avian influenza pandemic situation in fictitious States starting from WHO Phase 3 and progressing to Phase 4 and above. The exercise actively engaged all participants, and the presentations and discussions enabled them to appreciate the need for the guidelines and above all the desirability of a globally harmonised response by aviation and national authorities.

2.4.4 A walk through of Changi Airport, Singapore was undertaken on the afternoon of day two. This enabled participants to see at first hand how one major airport had met the challenge of pandemic planning and note the practical application of the relevant recommendations, as enumerated under the airport specific portion of the checklist.

#### **2.5 CAPSCA: Evaluation visits to participating States/administrations**

2.5.1 The continuing activities of the project involve, for participating States/administrations, a review of States/administrations, airports and airlines preparedness plans to ensure that the relevant policies, training and communication procedures are in place.

2.5.2 Evaluation visits to the following airports have been carried out by the CAPSCA Aviation Medicine Expert/Project Co-ordinator: Singapore (this was carried out in conjunction with the CAPSCA training seminar/workshop/tabletop exercise in September 2006), Macao (China), Hong Kong (China) and Thailand's Suvarnabhumi Airport in Bangkok.

2.5.3 Evaluation visits to Indonesia's Jakarta and Denpasar Airports are pending. These will be carried out as soon as the Indonesian authorities make the necessary arrangements for the evaluation visits to be conducted.

## **2.6 New project member States**

2.6.1 Malaysia has become the latest member State of the CAPSCA project. An evaluation visit has already been offered to Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA).

2.6.2 India has committed to joining the project and it is hoped that the necessary formalities can be resolved soon in order for them to become a member of the project. It is anticipated that four international airports will be evaluated in India.

2.6.3 An area of concern remains the fact that States/Administrations affected by the avian influenza outbreaks in poultry and with reported human cases of the H5N1 virus are still not coming forward to join the project. Funding has been cited as one of the factors for this reluctance.

## **2.7 Funding**

2.7.1 When the project commenced, initial funding was from the funds remaining from the Anti-SARS project. Subsequently, member States/administrations have contributed to the project enabling the evaluation visits.

2.7.2 In July 2007, the Central Fund for Influenza Action, a fund administered by the United Nations Development Programme under the auspices of the United Nations Development Group Office and Dr. David Nabarro, UN System Senior Coordinator for Avian and Human Influenza, approved a grant to ICAO of over US \$350 000 to enable CAPSCA to be carried forward in Asia and extended into Africa.

## **2.8 First Steering Committee Meeting of CAPSCA**

2.8.1 The first Steering Committee Meeting (SCM) of CAPSCA was held in Hong Kong from 30 to 31 August 2007. The SCM reviewed the progress of CAPSCA and in light of the funding from the United Nations, discussed the extension of the project to other States in Asia and also Africa.

## **3. CONCLUSION**

3.1 CAPSCA got off to a successful start with the training seminar/workshop/tabletop exercise held at the Singapore Aviation Academy in September 2006. The other activities of the project are well under way. New member States have joined or committed to joining the project. The need for harmonised pandemic preparedness planning and implementation is very clear and pressing. CAPSCA offers a strategic way to achieve this objective. The co-operation and collaboration of States/administrations of the region is paramount towards the fulfilment of this goal.

3.2 The Assembly should view with concern the fact that many States/administrations affected by avian influenza outbreaks in poultry and with reported human cases of the H5N1 virus are still not coming forward to join the project.

3.3 Singapore views with great concern the possibility of a communicable disease with pandemic potential affecting the global aviation industry. It has and will continue to commit resources and expert manpower to assist ICAO in its objective to have a harmonized response plan for the aviation sector.

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