BIOMETRIC IDENTIFICATION TO PROVIDE
ENHANCED SECURITY AND SPEEDIER BORDER CLEARANCE
FOR TRAVELLING PUBLIC

MONTREAL, 28 May 2003 - The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) has adopted a global, harmonized blueprint for the integration of biometric identification information into passports and other Machine Readable Travel Documents (MRTDs). The increased use of biometric-enhanced MRTDs will lead to speedier passage of travellers through airport controls, heightened aviation security and added protection against identity theft.

Biometrics is a means of identifying a person by biological features unique to an individual, using advanced computerized recognition techniques. This makes possible rapid comparison, either one-to-one with the person and document, or one-to-many using a database to positively identify an individual.

Facial recognition was selected as the globally interoperable biometric for machine-assisted identity confirmation with MRTDs. In a comprehensive analysis of various available biometrics, the face rated highest in terms of compatibility with key operational considerations, followed by fingers and eyes. The face has long been used by border control authorities and airline staff at airports to confirm identity with a "photo ID". Facial recognition technology automates this process, using a camera to capture the image of the face, while a computer validates facial characteristics.

ICAO also has selected high-capacity, contactless integrated circuit (IC) chips to store identification information in MRTDs -- passports, visas and identity cards. Compressed images of one or more biometrics would require more data storage capacity than is now available on bar codes.

The ICAO blueprint, set out in technical reports and specifications, will assist all 188 Member States to implement a worldwide, standardized system of identity confirmation. States will have the option of using one or two secondary biometrics to supplement facial recognition for personal identification.

A specially developed logical data structure (LDS) will provide a framework for programming data to ensure interoperability of travel documents and a modified public key infrastructure (PKI) scheme will provide security of data stored in the IC chip against unauthorized alteration or access.

More than100 Member States have issued to date some 700 million MRTDs and the numbers are increasing rapidly. Although initially developed to facilitate clearance in airports, MRTDs with the new identification procedures will be effective in seaports and at land borders as well.

"I encourage all Member States to cooperate fully in the implementation of this global identification framework that can significantly enhance public confidence in air travel security, encourage people to fly in greater numbers, and expedite the flow of passengers through airports", said Dr. Assad Kotaite, President of the Council of ICAO. "

ICAO has led the development of biometric-enhanced MRTDs since 1997, in close collaboration with the air transport industry and the International Organization for Standardisation (ISO).

Note to Editors: ICAO News Releases can be accessed on the ICAO web site: www.icao.int.

ICAO was created in 1944 to promote the safe and orderly development of civil aviation in the world. A specialized agency of the United Nations, it sets international standards and regulations necessary for the safety, security, efficiency and regularity of air transport and serves as the medium for cooperation in all fields of civil aviation among its 188 Contracting States.

- END -