

FACILITATION SMOOTHES THE JOURNEY THROUGH THE AIRPORT

The necessary but time-consuming inspection procedures of agriculture authorities at international boundaries have posed a significant challenge to providers of air transport.

Air travel and trade are particularly sensitive to the delaying effect of such formalities because of the speed of air travel itself. If, for example, inspections at each end of a trans-oceanic flight of six hours take up one hour, this means that a passenger's trip time has been increased by one third, while the same formalities add only about 2% to a five-day sea voyage across the same ocean.

For an air cargo shipment, the impact is even greater, as inspection requirements on the ground often consume more time than the goods spend in flight.

For the past 50 years, ICAO has worked with its Contracting States to find ways to shorten these delays, and International Standards on facilitation have been adopted.

Acutely aware of current airport congestion and the urgent need for more streamlined procedures for entry and departure, the Organization is working towards having every passenger on a flight cleared in 45 minutes or less regardless of the aircraft's size and the hour of arrival.

ICAO pursues these goals through its **Facilitation Program**, which encompasses virtually every facet of airport operations as they

directly affect passengers and cargo. These include, for example, customs, immigration, public health, agriculture, narcotics control and security, as well as document specifications and automated systems.

A major technological advance that is certain to completely transform passport control procedures for the better is what is known as the **Machine Readable Passport**.

Developed under the auspices of ICAO and first introduced in the United States in 1981, there are now well over 60 million such passports worldwide, enabling control authorities to perform some of their procedures automatically. An added benefit is the fact that the physical properties of the documents offer strong safeguards against alteration, forgery or counterfeiting.

ICAO has also introduced specifications for **Machine Readable Visas** and other types of official travel documents, which are being adopted by States in



ICAO's Facilitation Program encompasses almost every aspect of airport operations.