

PRESS RELEASE

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Aviation Security

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AAPA cautions against overreaction on aviation security

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia – Flying is widely recognised as the safest form of travel, reinforced by a robust regime of established security procedures. Unfortunately, it is human nature that each new security incident prompts a desire to introduce yet more security measures. There is always political pressure to react, but this often smacks of the need to be seen to be doing something rather than thinking through the appropriate action to take.

The public understand that no society can credibly claim to provide perfect security. It takes real political maturity to remain calm, and not fall into the trap of knee jerk reactions, such as the imposition of new security measures of unproven effectiveness. Additional security measures are only justified when it can be demonstrated that the benefits outweigh the additional burdens they impose on society.

Treating each of the six million passengers who fly every day as potential terrorists and subjecting them to virtual strip searches and pat-downs already borders on the absurd, particularly when compared to our approach to public security in other aspects of our daily lives. Doing so comes at a cost, already measured in tens of billions of dollars annually.

Whilst new screening technologies are constantly under evaluation, including full body scanners and automatic explosive detection systems, there is insufficient evidence regarding their effectiveness to justify their immediate deployment, not to mention unresolved health and privacy issues.

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The current debate on the merits or otherwise of passenger profiling raises a number of other important issues of fairness and preservation of human dignity, given the fact that 99.99 percent of passengers, even from supposedly higher risk categories, are entirely innocent.

Rather than focus on ever more intrusive passenger screening, the key lesson from this, and previous terrorist incidents, is the critical importance of effective intelligence gathering and analysis. Clearly, both inter-agency and inter-governmental cooperation needs to be reinforced.

Commenting on the current state of affairs, Mr. Andrew Herdman, Director General of the Association of Asia Pacific Airlines (AAPA) said, "AAPA understands the need to maintain the highest levels of security in air transportation and all airlines are committed to working closely with government security agencies and other stakeholders to ensure that air travel remains safe, secure and convenient. Despite recent events, public confidence in the safety of air travel remains high. Good security is all about comprehensive threat assessment and balanced risk management, not the elimination of every conceivable risk."

However, he cautioned: "It would be a tragedy if that confidence were to be undermined by ill-judged reactionary measures being taken by those entrusted with maintaining public safety. The sudden introduction by national governments of uncoordinated new security requirements, without prior consultation, makes practical implementation difficult. The fact that such requirements are unpublished, and even in some cases unwritten, inevitably leads to inconsistency of application. Far from reassuring passengers, the likely result is further confusion and unnecessary inconvenience. We urge governments to cooperate closely with industry and strive for global harmonisation of aviation security measures, working in conjunction with the International Civil Aviation Organisation."

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Association of Asia Pacific Airlines (AAPA)

The AAPA is the trade association for scheduled international airlines based in the Asia-Pacific region. The AAPA permanent secretariat is headquartered in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia with international representation in Brussels and Washington, D.C. Collectively, the region's airlines carry 520 million passengers and 15 million tonnes of cargo, representing one-quarter of global passenger traffic and two-fifths of global air cargo traffic respectively, and thus play a critically important role in the ongoing development of global aviation.

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