Cooperative Agreement for the Prevention of the Spread of Communicable Disease through Air Transportation – CAPSCA

Remarks by

Mr. Donald McPhail, Director General (Ag.), Eastern Caribbean Civil Aviation Authority (ECCAA), Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS)

Good morning all,

This morning I am privileged to make some brief remarks at this session to discuss the ICAO/PAHO CAPSCA Project – the Cooperative Agreement for the Prevention of the Spread of Communicable Disease by Air Transportation.

First of all, permit me to say that we at the Eastern Caribbean Civil Aviation Authority –ECCAA are pleased with the efforts of ICAO and PAHO to advance CAPSCA in the OECS, to ensure that all our Member States are involved in this very important project. To ensure that our airports are properly assessed and that the best practices are adopted to prevent the spread of communicable diseases.

Since 2003, following the outbreak of Sever Acute Respiratory Syndrome, SARS, ICAO has been strengthening its support for Article 14 to the Chicago Convention. Article 14 speaks to the Prevention of the Spread of Communicable diseases.

Despite the efforts of ICAO, its Contracting States have shown varying levels of interest in efforts in this direction, except in periods when a new outbreak surfaced.

We all can remember 2009, when we were faced with the outbreak of what was labeled as A(H1N1). The effects are still fresh in most of our minds.

Those of us who traveled during the period of that outbreak, I’m sure can recall, the efforts States were making to protect their citizens, residents and visitors. On arrival at some airports in the region, passengers got the impression that they were entering the emergency ward of a hospital.
Following the outbreak of H1N1 in 2009 the ICAO intensified its efforts towards the prevention of the spread of communicable diseases by air travel. While I will not go into the history of CAPSCA, it is worthy of note that both ICAO and PAHO in collaboration with the ECCAA have been attempting to organise a meeting targeting airport operators, Ministries responsible for Civil Aviation and Ministers responsible for Health in OECS Member States. The purpose of the meeting being to sensitize them of the importance of CAPSCA and to urge their participation in the airport assessments. We at the ECCAA view CAPSCA as a very important project for air transportation and international civil aviation in general. More than likely we can all recall the atmosphere of crisis which we faced in the OECS during the outbreak of H1N1. And I am sure we are all interesting in preventing such future occurrences or at least mitigating them.

Despite the plans our respective states may have had in place to respond to an outbreak such as H1N1, the reality is that most of us were under prepared if not reached close to the point of being overwhelmed. Outbreaks such as H1N1 and SARS are not known to come with warning and even when extra-regional states were being affected it appeared that our own efforts to take measures in the event that it would reach our shores were cursory at best. We think the time is now to take decisive steps to prevent the spread of communicable diseases in general and more so at our ports of entry. In this regard we recommend CAPSCA to all our States.

Recently, I had the pleasure of meeting with Mr. Stephen Harte of PAHO and based on the information he provided on CAPSCA, I am of the opinion that most of the major airports in the OECS would have no difficulty implementing CAPSCA measures.

We are aware of the economic challenges facing most States. We have no doubt that when it comes to budgeting for measures at the airports, especially at airports operated by Statutory Bodies, for the prevention of the spread of communicable diseases; there will be discord and discussions among local entities as to whose budget will fund these measures. Some will say it is an airport project, some will say it is a Ministry of health responsibility, while others may say it is a public health responsibility. We urge that you all view it as a national responsibility that would benefit your respective States and that you put budgetary differences aside and take a collaborative approach to achieve the goals of CAPSCA.

Let us wish ourselves a successful meeting, the start of a successful project in the OECS.