Smart Passport Technology to Expand Further Around the APEC Region

July 16, 2006, Hong Kong, China -- The adoption of smart passports by all APEC Member Economies will be advanced with a three day capacity building exercise to be attended by regional immigration officials in Hong Kong on July 18-20.

Taking place as part of an APEC Business Mobility Group (BMG) project, the Workshop on Biometric Technology in Machine Readable Travel Documents (MRTDs) is an opportunity for all APEC economies to work through the challenges that may be experienced as they introduce biometric passports.

Mr. Raymond Wong, Assistant Director, Hong Kong Immigration Department, and the Chair and Host of the Workshop, welcomed the event as an opportunity to enhance security and make it easier for legitimate travelers to move around the region.

“APEC Member Economies are leading the world in introducing passport technology that will undermine the activities of terrorists and other criminals,” Mr. Wong said in the lead-up to the workshop.

“The improved passport technology also speeds up immigration checks at airports and other borders.

“Passports are among the most valuable documents in mass use today and it is essential that we use the latest technology to protect them from theft and fraud.

“There are a number of issues to consider when economies introduce the new machine readable travel documents. This includes the deployment of the right biometric systems to best suit the needs of their border conditions and traffic.

“The introduction of biometric technology in passports and other travel documents is a complex and challenging process but is rewarded by increased protection from terrorist attack and criminal actions.”

The workshop in Hong Kong, China will cover areas such as the manufacture and storage of MRTDs, choosing the best biometrics that might include face, fingerprint and iris information and privacy issues.

All APEC economies have agreed to issue MRTDs by 2008 and will accelerate the replacement of older passports with MRTDs.

The APEC BMG is also working to assist APEC Member Economies adopt International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) standards for the issuing of smart passports.

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