

International Civil Aviation Organization's Statement to the IAEA Ministerial Conference on Nuclear Safety

Vienna 20-24 June 2011

Involvement of the aviation sector in the Joint Radiation Emergency Management Plan of the International Organizations: Lessons learned and ways forward.

On 11th March 2011, an earthquake of 9.0 magnitude struck Japan's east coast, triggering a tsunami that devastated northern parts of the country. The tsunami also caused a nuclear accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant resulting in the activation of the International Atomic Energy Agency Joint Radiation Emergency Management Plan of the International Organizations. Under this interagency framework, and as required by the International Civil Aviation, the air traffic control centres, upon receiving information on the accidental release of radiation to the atmosphere from the IAEA via the World Meteorological Organization's Regional Specialized Meteorological Centre (RSMC), immediately informed aircraft in flight about the release and provided advice on possible routes. In addition, Japan issued weather advisories relevant to the safety of aircraft and alerted pilots of hazards en route.

Realising the importance of addressing the particular concerns of air and marine transport in the course of the emergency response to the nuclear emergency, ICAO initiated and coordinated the work of an ad-hoc Transport Task Force – although its creation is not stipulated by the Joint Plan. The Task Force brought together a number of UN agencies: IAEA; International Maritime Organization; World Health Organization; World Meteorological Organization; World Tourism Organization; International Labour Organization; as well as ICAO. The private sector trade associations such as the International Air Transport Association representing international aircraft operators, and Airports Council International representing airport operators, also participated. The trade association representatives brought a number of practical issues to the attention of the ad-hoc Task Force, such as the relative lack of health-related information for transport workers travelling to Japan and for those who might be involved in radiation screening.

ICAO contributed to the Task Force by providing expertise in many of its specialised fields. Topics such as health risks to travellers flying through a radioactive cloud, and screening of travellers at airports for radiation were considered. Technical advice was provided to State regulatory authorities and airline operators, amongst others, concerning safe routing of aircraft in proximity to the accident site. Furthermore, ICAO provided assistance and guidance on safe limits for transport of potentially radioactive cargo and persons. In fact, swift introduction of an amendment to ICAO Technical Instructions For The Safe Transport of Dangerous Goods by Air enabled the air transport of persons contaminated by radioactive material for medical treatment. Airworthiness experts considered the risks to aircraft from exposure to radiation.

Many of these topics required the coordinated input from several organisations, and it was through the collective efforts of many individuals in the ad-hoc Task Force that

the transport system remained functional and confidence of the concerned travelling public was maintained. Joint news releases were issued and significant disruption was averted by reassuring all involved in the transport chain that the movement of people and cargo was safe based on official sources of information. Close coordination with all stakeholders facilitated the humanitarian relief efforts.

Recognizing that the Joint Radiation Emergency Management Plan of the IAEA was very effective, ICAO's expanded involvement highlighted the potential advantage of further improvement to the Joint Plan concerning the transport sector.

Therefore, we are proposing an amendment of the Joint Radiation Emergency Management Plan in order to allow strengthening of the involvement of the international transport modal authorities such as the International Maritime Organization and ICAO.

Further, recognising that transport serves the socio-economic interests of the global population, and following the lead of IAEA at this meeting in creating an opportunity for the United Nations system and Governments to collaborate, ICAO calls for the creation of an Inter-agency Committee on Transport.

This Committee would consider means by which to increase the crisis management preparedness and response of the transport sector during an emergency, be it a natural disaster, threat of a pandemic disease, industrial or nuclear accident. Improving the sector's ability to respond to emergencies would further facilitate the work of agencies providing humanitarian aid, and of governments struggling with the economic impact of reduced travel and trade. It would address the direct and immediate effect on the transport sector itself resulting from reduced demand for services during emergency situations. It would also help to reduce the number of denials for transportation of life-saving radiopharmaceuticals.

In summary, we believe that, by furthering inter-agency communication and collaboration, those of us involved in the transport sector can help manage and minimise the effects of tragedies such as that experienced by Japan.