

Security is of great concern to all in the travel industry, and that includes governments, airports, airlines and naturally consumers. But very regrettably, global terrorism and the threat of contagious disease are now our constant companions. Travel and tourism are great but fragile creatures. A bomb in Bali sends shockwaves worldwide. And as we learned last year with the SARS experience, when China sneezes, the entire world is at risk.

At the IATA AGM in Singapore earlier this month, Director General Giovanni Bisignani made the point that "security is the promise we make to the 1.6 billion air travelers every year." Air transport has been a target of terrorism for many years, but the attacks of September 11 set in motion a fundamental shift in response.

(WAR AND PESTILENCE)

The economic damage of 9/11 was compounded by the war in Iraq and the SARS outbreaks. The 12 months between April 2003 and March 2004 saw a steep drop in Japanese international passengers of 3.2 million. But we were not alone. Throughout Asia and well beyond, carriers lost many billions of dollars and are still in the recovery process.

After a very shaky start, Asian carriers learned from the SARS outbreak that cooperation and harmonization work. The subsequent coordination between IATA, the WHO and national health agencies, with support from regional travel associations, produced a blueprint for the future. When Avian Flu raised its head early this year, we were better prepared because of the lessons of the SARS experience.

(COORDINATION)

The desperate situation following 9/11 resulted in uncoordinated actions by governments, as we saw later with SARS. Airlines struggled on in a rapidly changing situation dominated by chaos and confusion. Today, nearly three years later, the response of governments still remains inconsistent.

Better global coordination is urgently needed. And this requires multilateral cooperation.

(COST BURDEN SHARING)

Take the cost issue. Last year the airline industry worldwide paid more than 5 billion dollars for security. But security of citizens is a state responsibility. Why should the people who choose to travel by air have to pay for their own security, when states pay the cost of security for those who travel by rail or sea, or attend the Olympic games? Air travel warrants similar treatment, as it is now a commonplace, essential part of national and international economic activity.

In a clear demonstration of leadership, the US government has taken the decision to bear the cost of security. This sets an excellent example to other countries, as it shows that the US accepts that it is the state's responsibility to pay for the protection of its citizens. Not all countries see it that way. Providing security is a national duty and not a matter of subsidy, as some governments would have it. What we need is a level playing field in the application of security costs.

(SECURITY BALANCE)

We have seen passenger demand plunge drastically on once-popular routes. The reason has not always been due to a direct terror threat, but rather to the result of the heavy-handed and insensitive response of national agencies.

Business travelers have profits and dividends as their incentives to travel. That market is back. But leisure travelers have other needs. They want to enjoy sightseeing, good food, relaxation, cultural events, and so on. But above all, they want to be made welcome. If the welcome mat is removed, we cannot blame them for choosing to go elsewhere – or staying at home.

Christopher Brown, Managing Director and CEO of Tourism and Transport Forum Australia, and a noted expert on tourism, made the following

comments in May of this year at the 4th World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) Summit held in Doha, Qatar.

The travel & tourism industry is all about telling tourists to come and have a magical experience. A holiday is a piece of magic. And that magic shouldn't include having to spend half your day in an airport. It shouldn't include applying for visas two months out, sending your passport off to places unknown. It shouldn't include being frisked and searched at every airport.

We need to get the balance right between security and the process. We've obviously over-reacted. If there was not enough security before, perhaps there is too much now. Maybe we need to recalibrate it to make sure that people actually have a holiday and an enjoyable experience and don't feel they are going through a concentration camp every time they take a holiday.

These are strongly worded views, bluntly delivered, but I think he has a point.

(SYSTEM STANDARDS)

Turning from cost issues to methodology, this industry also needs a common, universal security policy on passenger and cargo screening, using globally acceptable systems. This needs cooperation and dialogue between carriers, airports and government agencies. An example is biometric testing at airports.

(BIOMETRICS)

In some countries, there has been negative reaction to some new security measures. A prime example is the news that the United States will require citizens of 27 nations now enjoying visa waiver status to be photographed and fingerprinted upon arrival in the US. This process will not take long - up to 15 seconds per person - and many countries accept that the US is entitled to take such measures. Nevertheless, there has also been criticism both in the United States and abroad towards the requirement for visitors to the US from visa waiver countries to have biometric passports from October 26.

The airlines, through IATA, supported biometrics in passports long before the tragedy of September 11. IATA helped the development of ICAO's worldwide biometric standards that the US now wants other countries to implement later this year. As IATA chief Giovanni Bisignani said in April, "We applaud the US initiative, but the timetable is not realistic."

Addressing the debate over what types of biometric information should be included as part of new visa-security measures for foreigners entering the United States, U.S. Congressman John Carter was recently quoted in Newsweek magazine. He said: "We should be driving this train, not the international community. We're the ones that got our buildings blown up." That makes it very clear to anybody who has any doubts. But at the same time it strengthens the case made by critics that some of the action on security is being handled on a unilateral basis.

(HARMONIZATION – NOT UNILATERAL APPROACH)

We can understand unilateral action in an emergency. And some people might say that we are in a perpetual state of emergency these days. But a unilateral approach does not offer global solutions. We need a global solution to the security problem, and we need the leadership to carry it forward.

The IATA Director General said in Washington in April, "When governments cooperate on security, the system grows stronger. When they do not, airlines are caught in the middle and the efficient international transport system the world's airlines provide are put at risk."

Harmonization of security measures can be achieved only by working together, not against each other. For example, the Department of Home Security (DHS) requirement for access to airline reservations records created a major problem for carriers operating from Europe, as compliance with those demands would have meant breaking European privacy laws. The US

and the EC have recently settled this issue through consultations, with help from IATA. ICAO is now working on a global solution.

Harmonization is at work elsewhere. IATA is working with the TSA and the EC on security issues which include baggage security, crew data and cargo security.

As I mentioned earlier, it is our firm belief that states are responsible for protecting civil aircraft in their airspace. That includes protection from attacks by hand-held ground-to-air missiles, or 'MANPADS.' Through IATA, we now have a close working relationship with the DHS on the MANPADS issue. And we sincerely hope that this will prove to the world that working in harmony with the world's airlines will achieve workable solutions within reasonable schedules for the many security-related tasks ahead.

(LEADERSHIP)

The TSA has done a remarkable job in providing enhanced security measures at some 450 airports across the United States, an impressive result in a relatively short time. Even so, at recent industry conferences, I have heard criticism of the US approach to security issues. Some of this is justified, but much is not.

This world is no stranger to terrorism. It has been with us for many years – in Asia, the Middle East and Europe. But the savage attacks of September 11 changed things in ways we could never before imagine. These were domestic attacks, launched from within the United States, using domestic airliners as guided weapons. Until 9/11, terrorist attacks within the US were unthinkable. The 50 states were perceived as a safe haven. There is no doubt that these traumatic events have changed American perceptions fundamentally – and that needs to be fully recognized.

But terrible though those attacks were, let us not lose the plot on security.

Let us always put harmonization and coordination before unilateralism, maintaining a balance between security and the processes to achieve it while improving the efficiency and facilitating the ease of travel.

Please bear in mind that the global air transport industry continues to look to the United States for leadership.