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**Subject: BORDERPOL calls for intelligence led airline and border security**

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PR/001/01/10

7th January 2010

As governments worldwide scramble to respond to the so-called 'underpants bomber', Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, who boarded airplanes freely from Lagos to Amsterdam to Detroit, BORDERPOL calls for the formation of international border organization to provide an international solution to an international problem.

So far, we have heard little from the US and UK beyond speeding up the use of body scanners at airports and prescribing who should be scanned. But are scanners the answer?

A basic fact is that that there were grounds for preventing Abdulmutallab from getting on to an aircraft in the first place, as he was by then on at least two watch lists; one in the US and one in Nigeria and probably in the UK as well. He had also had a visa request to visit the UK in May 2009 rejected by the UK Border Agency and, by the time he reached Amsterdam, he was flagged in the U.S. consular database as being presumptively ineligible for a visa due to having been nominated to the terrorist watch list.

So how did this happen?

It happened in part because, believe it or not, over eight years after 9/11 we have not even begun discussions on an internationally shared watch list which could be available to embassy staff, immigration officials, border police and airport security staff involved in implementing travel, aviation and border security. Nor do we have a well established standard for deciding the level of risk that is appropriate to accept for air travellers.

Stove-piping of information remains endemic among agencies, but it is far worse between countries and is, without doubt the weakest link in international cross border security.

Sometimes information sharing is a problem with legacy information systems, sometimes due to concerns about privacy and data protection. More often than not, however, the real problem is a lack of willingness on the part of politicians and government officials to find solutions to implement it.

BORDERPOL's view is, collectively, border and transportation officials, in cooperation with intelligence

and law enforcement authorities, can do a far better job of prevention than we have done so far.

BORDERPOL continues to advocate the establishment of an international global extranet designed for sharing information on suspect individuals among border agencies of allied countries involved in border security.

Held by BORDERPOL as a trusted third party; basic information on suspect individuals such as name, date and place of birth, the reason they are on the list (e.g. visa rejection, Home Office, UK), photo and source, would be available to officers of those countries that have signed up to the scheme. The system would allow them to flag up suspect individuals either for further questioning or action, such as in this case, visa rejection or withdrawal.

It is true that the integration of intelligence was faulty in this case. But there were potential opportunities for border and transportation officials to use their discretion to prevent travel or at a minimum to undertake additional screening that might have resulted in detection of the explosives.

It is here that body scanners can play an important role in security, especially against unknown clandestine terrorists like Richard Reid, the shoe-bomber who was not on anyone's radar screen.

But the technology remains imperfect. The millimetre wave and back-scatter body scanners that have until now been advocated as best practice may not have identified the explosives carried by the 'underpants bomber.' Certainly scanners of this type would not have picked up explosives carried internally, the method used by Al Qaeda suicide bomber Abdullah Hassan Tali al-Asiri back in August 2009 in an attempt to blow up Prince Nayef of Saudi Arabia.

The through-body X-ray scanner, now in the news, will indeed pick up anything carried internally or externally. They are already in operation in some airports worldwide, targeting drug traffickers. But some may deem this method practical primarily for use on targeted individuals identified by other methods. Better technologies for explosives detection for mass people screening are currently not ready for effective deployment.

In addition to focusing on improvements in screening technology, we should be devoting more serious attention to overcoming obstacles to making better information available to border authorities.

There was opportunity to pick up Abdulmutallab as a potential threat, initially at the U.S. Embassy by authorities there; and subsequently at airports in Lagos and Amsterdam. Travel and transportation security officials should have been able to access intelligence information and combine this with other information, such as his ticket paid by cash, no checked luggage and seat position (bombers tend to request seats in the area of the fuel tanks, vis-a-vis Richard Reid the shoe bomber), to call for additional screening, if not no-fly status.

While this incident clearly calls for better integration of intelligence at the outset, it remains true that travel and transportation authorities must add additional layers of prevention. An integrated security system with effective information sharing, well motivated and trained staff, using good profiling and screening techniques, operating with the appropriate technology, will make a difference.

Border policing is not like other forms of policing. It requires a specialist organization like BORDERPOL that can provide the foundation for sharing information and facilitating the complex multilateral effort which will be required to dramatically increase the effectiveness of airline and cross border security with minimum intrusion to legitimate travellers.

**Let's work together to incorporate the lessons we are already learning from another near miss and make the right decisions to prevent terrorist attacks in the future.**

**Editors Notes:**

**BORDERPOL is a 21st Century global border security body dedicated to making international borders smarter and safer. Recognizing the need for the establishment of a global home to over 1000 border related services BORDERPOL was officially registered in March 2003 as a non profit international association with Headquarters in Ottawa, Canada. It's primary mission is to represent the interests of and to facilitate co-operation among progressive national border services and related agencies in order to establish and operate border systems that effectively protect and efficiently connect the international community.**

**For further information, please contact:**

**Thomas A. (Tom) Tass  
Executive Director  
WBO-BORDERPOL  
Tel: +1 (509) 278 1660  
E-mail: [borderpol@borderpol.org](mailto:borderpol@borderpol.org)**

**Tony Kingham  
Press Officer  
WBO-BORDERPOL  
Tel: +44(0)208 144 5934  
Fax: +44(0)870 912 9466  
Email: [tony.kingham@worldsecurity-index.com](mailto:tony.kingham@worldsecurity-index.com)**

**Or visit our web site: [www.borderpol.com](http://www.borderpol.com)**

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