

ISSUE 8

WORKING TOWARDS A HARMONISED SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

Moving cargo across the globe goes beyond logistical concerns. It involves collaboration and a harmonised set of security measures between aviation bodies. *Bridging Skies* talks to Thomson Hunter, Regional Aviation Security Liaison Officer (Asia Pacific) of the United Kingdom's (UK) Department of Transport (DfT) about liaising with governments and security professionals around the region as well as the latest developments that shape current aviation security practices in the movement of people and goods.



Thomson Hunter (Right), Regional Aviation Security Liaison Officer (Asia Pacific) of the United Kingdom's (UK) Department of Transport

Tell us a little about what you do.

My job requires me to travel around the region to check on the UK carriers to ensure that the carriers operate in a secure environment. To do this, I am given access to see how security works in various airports to ensure the appropriate levels of security are provided by the host airport for the UK carriers. The UK seeks engagement with all countries across Asia Pacific in order to achieve the common goal of improved aviation security.

What do you think is the level of security at the airports around the region?

While aviation security is regarded as a top priority, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region is very economically diverse and thus, countries differ in their security priorities. Developing countries have budget limitations to expand and enhance their systems to encompass a comprehensive and robust security framework, while developed countries have moved on and are now focusing on addressing security technology and other ways of mitigating threats.

In your opinion, what more can be done by these countries?

As a first step, during my visits, some countries have opened up to ask for my feedback on their security systems. I meet with government policy representatives, transport ministries, people in civil aviation, airport authorities, private airport organisations and the police to communicate my observations, which hopefully, will be of value to them to enhance their security at the airports.

As a region, it is also beneficial for ASEAN to harmonise and work towards a common level of understanding on security measures. This not only enhances aviation security standards across the region as a whole, but also facilitates procedures and processes for the movement of passengers and goods.

How can this be done?

As a start, cross-cultural understanding is crucial in successful inter-government collaborations for reaching this common understanding among countries.

For instance, my involvement with the ASEAN explores common security issues and ways to deal with them. In our recent discussions, invited representatives from the ASEAN governments shared their varied experiences and learned from each other how security is managed in their respective airports. More than that, next steps were also discussed – moving from not just relying on technology advancement, but also to inter-government collaborations that focus on improved training and more streamlined airport management to tighten the security procedures.

Best practices were also shared and highlighted – from proper staff recruitment, background checks on staff, training, supervision and management – and through communication and observation, each country can adapt their own security measures, policies and procedures for improvement.

Are there notable developments since 9/11?

9/11 changed public perception and the attitude towards security checks at airports. There is now more understanding, tolerance and even a level of appreciation of security measures implemented at entry points at the airports. People now understand the need for them.

Has your time here in Singapore added to your own experiences and knowledge in tackling aviation security issues?

For my part, I would like to have more opportunities to have constant dialogues with the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore (CAAS) to adopt new security measures and be able to observe and glean lessons which I can take with me back to the UK.

I also see my role here as a channel for CAAS to learn what is being done in the UK.