

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Passport Fraud: An International Vulnerability***

April 4, 2014 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Border and Maritime Security subcommittee hearing entitled “Passport Fraud: An International Vulnerability”:

“Learning that two of the passengers on Malaysian Airlines Flight 370 boarded the flight with stolen passports has focused much-needed attention on this issue. It is my understanding that the U.S. is one of only a few countries that systematically screens travelers’ documents against lost and stolen passport databases.

In fact, less than 20 of INTERPOL’s 190 member countries systematically check travelers’ passports against the Stolen and Lost Travel Document (SLTD) database currently. Prior to the Flight 370 incident, Malaysia’s Immigration Department had not conducted a single check of passengers’ documents against the database all year.

The underuse of this important resource is extremely troublesome, as the database contains more than 40 million travel documents reported lost or stolen by 167 countries. If countries are going to spend the time and effort reporting lost and stolen documents to INTERPOL, they must be encouraged to utilize the data when screening passengers.

It is important to note that in the case of Flight 370, there is no evidence that the individuals flying on stolen passports had connections to terrorism or were involved in the flight’s disappearance. That may not always be so, however.

We know that as technology makes it more difficult to create fraudulent travel documents such as passports, terrorists and criminals are more likely to attempt to use genuine documents that do not belong to them to travel or enter foreign countries. Addressing this vulnerability is vital to global aviation and border security.

Finally, I would point out that increased use of biometrics to screen travelers arriving and departing this country is another way to combat identity fraud and better secure the traveling public. We should keep that in mind as we continue to work towards a biometric entry-exit system in this country.

Today, I look forward to hearing from our DHS and State Department witnesses about what the U.S. is doing to close any remaining vulnerabilities with respect to lost and stolen passports for travelers to and from the U.S.

Also, I hope to hear from our INTERPOL witness about their efforts to encourage member countries to utilize the SLTD, particularly in the wake of the Flight 370 incident. It is my hope that more countries will avail themselves of this resource so that Americans traveling between foreign countries, and all of the flying public, will be more secure.”

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