The Bahamas Awards Indusa LLC its Contract for Biometric Passports, Visas, Work Permits and Border Control Management systems.

Bahamas Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Public Service Fred Mitchell (right) and James Ram, President of Indusa Global, a US-based IT development and consulting firm, sign contracts on 22nd December 2006 for the provision of e-passports, biometric visas, work permits and other identity documents, as well as a border control management system for The Bahamas.

Nassau, The Bahamas – December 26, 2006 – The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of The Bahamas and Indusa Global LLC announce the signing of a contract to provide The Bahamas, the first biometrics E-Passport solution in the Americas. The Indusa Global solution adheres to the International Civil Aviation Organization's (ICAO) standards and delivers a multi-level identity management solution combining fingerprints, facial characteristics, and signature capture. In accordance with ICAO's global objectives, requiring all countries to have machine-readable passports by May 2010, The Bahamas Passport project is a comprehensive system for the issuance of E-Passports, Visas, Work Permits, and other travel documents, extending to Border Control Management as well as the overall collection, verification, and management of biometric data.

"This highly automated and fully secure identity management and border control system will enhance our capabilities in securing The Bahamas from identity theft, which tends to go hand-in-hand with illegal migration and drug smuggling", said The Hon. Fred Mitchell, The Bahamas Minister of Foreign Affairs.

"At Indusa Global, we are pleased to be working with The Bahamas on such a complex and challenging system because The Bahamas is a popular tourist destination, comprising over 700 islands with approximately twenty international points of entry for air and cruise visitors and returning nationals", said James Ram, President of Indusa Global LLC.

"We chose Indusa because they offered a system that was high-tech and secure, yet simple and convenient. It is very important that we afford The Bahamian people an easy way to apply for a passport, as well as simplify the process for our visitors wishing to obtain a visa or work permit, which will also include the new biometric features. The enrolment process is going to be fast and intuitive, and we will be able to collect biometric data at the same time as demographic information that has always been required," added Mr. Vernon Burrows, The Bahamas Director of Immigration.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs Passport Launch Press Release:

THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

PRESS RELEASE

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is pleased to announce the signing of a contract this morning by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Hon. Fred Mitchell and Mr. James Ram, President of Indusa LLC, a Greenville, South Carolina based IT development and consulting firm, for the provision of e-passports, biometric visas, work permits and other identity documents, as well as a border control management system.

For this integrated project, Indusa has partnered with Iris Berhad, a Malaysian global security solution provider and the company which pioneered the world's first electronic passport and national multi-application smart card. Another implementation partner is the British company De La Rue, the world's largest commercial security provider and papermaker, and a long time provider of our Bahamian passport.

While this combined project will take a year to be fully implemented, the first set of new passports is expected to be issued by September 2007. The visas should be available earlier. The Ministry is working with the Attorney General's office with a view to drafting new regulations to implement new visas in different categories.

In earlier statements, I have said that the idea of the new passports is to update the security features on Bahamian identity documents and to bring these documents into compliance with the standards mandated by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) before May 2010.

The passports have not yet been priced but when they become available they are likely to be substantially higher in cost than the existing passport but more durable. There will be an electronic chip in this passport and it will contain a fingerprint as an identifying marker for the passport.
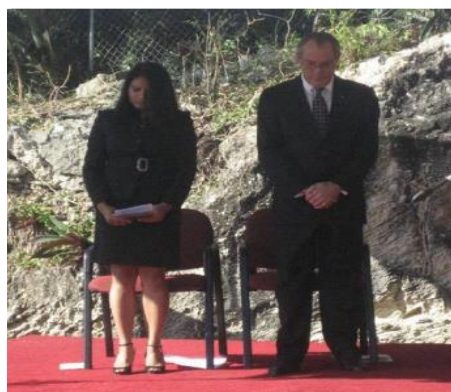
I have read recently some reports that emanating from Germany that even e passports can be cloned. I have had this checked and I am advised Indusa's solution which involves a multi-level identity management solution combining machine readable passports with chip-based biometrics authentication for fingerprints, facial characteristics and signature capture, contains adequate safeguards to ensure that the passport holder is, indeed, the person to whom the passport was issued by Bahamian passport issuing authorities. We need therefore to note that while no system is foolproof the system will be more secure than the existing document and further this security will be enhanced by levels of security that will all have to be shown to be correct before the identity is accepted. There was an article in yesterday's Wall Street Journal 21st December that addresses this concern.

The new passport, visa and work permit system will allow for an integrated data base so that immigration and Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the police will all be connected and be able to better able the management of our border.

The Bahamas launches America's first Biometric ePassports, Visas, Work Permits and Border Control Management system.

The Bahamas ePassport was officially launched on December 5, 2007, in a move to increase protection against identity theft, heighten aviation security and combat illegal immigration.
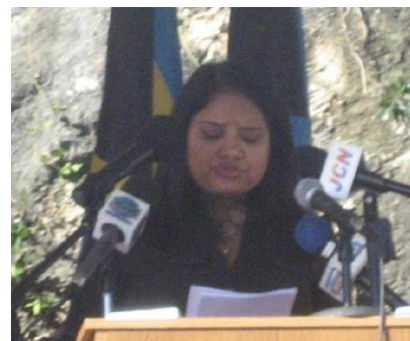

Nassau, The Bahamas – December 5, 2007 – In 1994, the Government of The Bahamas began exploring the process of upgrading passports and other travel documents. On December 22, 2006, the Government signed a contract with Indusa Global, an information technology development and consulting firm, for an estimated $12.7 million to provide four systems to initiate the project. "It is a privilege for Indusa Global to work with the Bahamas Government and launch the first fully biometric ePassport in the Americas," said Jo Ram, Chief Operating Officer who led the project for Indusa Global.

They are: An ePassport issuance system, a Machine-Readable Visa system, an E-Identification issuance system (smart cards for holders of work permits, spousal permits, homeowners residence permits, permanent residence) and a Border Control Management System.

"By this initiative, The Bahamas will be ICAO compliant. We have had to and will undertake several actions and activities to facilitate our ePassport and Machine-Readable visa initiative, and to ensure that our transition occurs as smoothly as possible," Mr. Symonette said.

The International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), of which The Bahamas is a member, has mandated that by 2010, all countries must be issuing Machine Readable Passports. Additionally, The Bahamas added a Key Management System for the generation and management of digital security keys for the protection and access of data stored in the passports and cards. This particular system is used to add security to The Bahamas passport chips and smart cards and forms the basis of verifying that the ePassport and e-Ids are in fact issued by The Bahamas Government.

This is an integrated project involving the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Department of Immigration (Ministry of National Security), and the Data Processing Unit of the Ministry of Finance. The modern passport is being upgraded from a simple paper document to a more secure one – with biometrics features including facial characteristics, and fingerprinting. Each passport holder is required to have a National Insurance Number in order to facilitate the new passport.

'The security of our identity and travel documents is of paramount importance to us. We must ensure, therefore, that our passports and visas are resistant to fraudulent use, including the use of lost or stolen passports," Mr. Symonette said. Mr Symonette is urging Bahamians to keep their passports in a safe environment. He further advised that they photocopy the first four pages of the document, in the event it is lost or stolen. This would assist in processing a new passport.

FEATURE

The case for biometric passports in emerging markets

Since 9/11, the global security landscape has changed. The increased threat of terrorism and the universal problem of identity theft and fraud have forced governments to make a concerted effort to improve the security of their national borders. A major tool in their arsenal is the introduction of ePassports and ID cards that include biometric identifiers.

For many countries, the move towards biometrics at border controls makes perfect sense. States that are part of the US Visa Waiver Program had an obvious incentive to adopt the technology – if they didn't comply with the requirement to incorporate biometric identity authentication by October 2006, they risked losing their visa waiver status. But it is not only the 27 visa waiver countries that have embraced biometrics.

Although the Visa Waiver Program has provided a key impetus to adopt biometric ePassports, the push towards the use of these documents dates back to before 9/11. As long ago as the beginning of 2001, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) identified face recognition as the single most likely biometric to be combined with machine readable travel documents (MRTD) in order to allow machine-assisted ID confirmation of passengers. And in May 2003, the ICAO recommended that all its 188-member countries adopt the use of biometric ePassports, in particular integrating facial recognition, and at a second level, fingerprints, into their national documents.

While not a visa-waiver country, The Bahamas has recently moved in this direction, having awarded its contract for biometric passports, visas, work permits and border control management systems to IT consulting firm Indusa Global. It has operated in The Bahamas for more than four years, working for the Ministry of Tourism and The Ministry of Labour & Immigration and processing the country's immigration cards. Many other non-visa waiver countries are also taking this opportunity to strengthen the security of their documents and their immigration processes. The ICAO estimates that more than 40 countries have now taken steps to secure their travel documents by introducing ePassports. Among the countries whose plans to launch – or actual pilots and rollouts of – biometric ePassports or national ID cards have hit the headlines over the past year are The Bahamas, India, Malaysia, Indonesia, Egypt, Brazil, Nigeria, Somalia, Thailand, South Africa, Qatar, Oman and Saudi Arabia. None of these countries felt 'forced' to roll out the technology – but each believes a business case can be made for the deployment of ePassports.

Motivation

Countries outside of the Visa Waiver Program are motivated to be among the wave of first-adopters of the technology by the real and growing threat of identity theft and document forgery. In June 2002, Interpol identified a clear link between terrorist activities and the use of lost or stolen travel documents and has launched a Stolen and lost Travel Documents (STD) database. In 2006, the database broke the 10 million mark. Millions more documents remain unregistered as lost or stolen. Passport integrity and confidence in the legitimacy of a state's travel documents on the part of foreign border control authorities are significant factors in the security of the global travel system. Thus the countries with the highest risk of identity fraud also have the most to gain from issuing ePassports. Malaysia and Nigeria, for instance, were notorious sources of forged passports, but have become some of the earliest ePassport adopters in order to fix the problem.

In addition to countering identity fraud, ePassports have other benefits, including better control of illegal immigration and identification of criminal activities. In the case of The Bahamas, its strategic situation as a significant migration gateway between the US and other, poorer, Caribbean nations, makes it a country where illegal migration is a major issue, with the Ministry of Labour and Immigration pledging to "stem the flow of illegal immigrants". The Bahamas Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Hon Fred Mitchell, explains the importance of the country's adoption of ePassports: "This highly automated and fully secure identity management and border control system will enhance our capabilities in securing The Bahamas from identity theft, which tends to go hand-in-hand with illegal migration and drug smuggling."

For nations which have not already implemented a Machine Readable Passport (MRP), it is also far more cost effective to skip a product generation and move straight to the latest ePassports. Cost savings are significant and measurable for countries which implement both machine readable and ePassports in one step. Those considering such implementations are cutting costs by more than 30%, a considerable saving bearing in mind the magnitude of most ePassport projects.

Challenges

Many emerging economies operate in environments where geography, economy and culture can be a challenge. What makes The Bahamas solution so complex is that the country is made up of 700 islands

with approximately twenty international points of entry for visitors and returning nationals, ranging from a primary air or sea port to a smaller border post managed by a single officer. In addition, some of the Bahamian islands are so small that they lack the infrastructure, including electronic equipment, bandwidth or even adequate power, to run highly secure systems at rudimentary and unsecured border posts. A big challenge for companies deploying technology to countries such as The Bahamas, is how to balance the needs of a high-tech secure system with the laid-back lifestyle of the islanders without entirely changing the lives of the Bahamian people managing it.

Training enforcement officers how to use the new system is vital, as is making them understand, accept and support the system's goals of protecting their country from illegal immigration fraud.

Emerging economies are often overlooked by some biometrics solutions providers in favour of the big hitters of the G8. But these countries provide enormous opportunities for businesses involved in biometrics – provided they understand the politics, economics and geography of each unique nation.

This feature was provided by James Ram, CEO and president of Indusa Global and Mallika Gadepalli of Indusa Global. They can be contacted at: Tel: +1 404 459 9868, Fax: +1 864 655 0021, email: jram@indusaglobal.com, Web: www.indusaglobal.com