

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Flying Blind: What are the Security Risks of Resuming U.S. Commercial Air Service to Cuba?***

March 2, 2016 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Transportation Security subcommittee hearing entitled “Flying Blind: What are the Security Risks of Resuming U.S. Commercial Air Service to Cuba?”:

“Earlier this year, the Obama Administration and Cuban government finalized an arrangement that will resume commercial aviation between the United States and Cuba. We, as a committee with oversight jurisdiction of transportation security matters, have the great responsibility of ensuring that the Transportation Security Administration, the Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protections, and other relevant agencies are doing their due diligence to ensure that the flights departing from Cuba to the United States are secure.

Although not last points of departure, the recent bombings of planes originating from Mogadishu, which killed one, and Sharm al-Shiekh, tragically killing everyone on board, serve as stern reminders that there are those who wish to do us harm using commercial aircraft.

There are over 300 airports around the world that serve as last points of departure, or foreign airports that fly directly to the U.S. The standard is always that TSA and other relevant government entities perform the investigations and mitigation measures necessary to ensure that these flights are not able to be targeted by nefarious characters. As I understand it, the agency’s efforts to inspect and prepare the Cuban airports are no different than the stringent inspections, efforts, and regulatory schemes that are in place at other last point of departure airports.

The title of this hearing, “Flying Blind”, would lead you to believe that nothing has been done to assess these airports before they schedule commercial service to and from the United States. TSA informs us that they are inspecting and evaluating airports, even as we speak. These airports must have a level of security at least on par with International Civil Aviation Organization standards, and inspectors are ensuring this now. TSA also has the power to implement regulatory schemes that compel airlines to perform additional security measures beyond ICAO standards.

I look forward to hearing from Assistant Secretary Fujimara, the head of the Office of Global Strategies, on what his teams are doing to ensure security in Cuban airports, and what additional mitigation measures he plans to implement. I also look forward to hearing from Deputy Assistant Commissioner Wagner, who will talk to us about the role that CBP plays in foreign fighter travel prevention and fraudulent document detection efforts.

I thank Assistant Secretary Stoddard for appearing today to speak on the broader aspects of DHS policy in these matters. I understand that Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Tong has a hard stop due to other engagements, but look forward to hearing his insight on the negotiation process that lead to the aviation arrangement with Cuba.”

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