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Press Release

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BORDERS' AVATAR ON DUTY IN BUCHAREST AIRPORT

TUCSON, Ariz. –December 9-13, 2013, the AVATAR, will be at Henri Coandă International Airport in Bucharest, Romania to run a field test alongside EU border guards. This activity is sponsored and coordinated by Frontex, the EU border-control agency who has been working with The National Center for Border Security and Immigration (BORDERS) researchers since 2010.

AVATAR is being developed by BORDERS, a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Center of Excellence headquartered at the University of Arizona and is a kiosk-based automated screening system for credibility assessment. AVATAR automatically conducts natural, brief interviews in a number of screening contexts, such as trusted traveler application programs, personnel reinvestigations, visa application reviews, or similar scenarios where truth assessment is a key concern. AVATAR uses non-invasive sensors to identify suspicious or irregular behavior that deserves further investigation.

The objective of this field trial is to allow actual airport travelers from around the world to interact and be interviewed by the AVATAR after disembarking their flights and entering Romanian passport control. The AVATAR will tailor its interview to their language and ask country specific visa questions while measuring behavior, physiology, and verbal responses. After the interview, EU border guards will be provided behavioral interview summaries on remote tablets that are designed to inform entry decision making for the future of border control.

In addition, the study hopes to better understand how the AVATAR system will be used and can be integrated into future operations, both from the passenger and border agent perspectives. “We are thrilled to get the AVATAR into a real-world testing scenario and to see how people interact with the technology in an airport setting,” said BORDERS Director and AVATAR Principal Investigator, Dr. Jay Nunamaker.

Border security experts (e.g., guards, fraudulent document detection, anti-trafficking) from EU Member States, students from the “A.I. Cuza” Police Academy and researchers and professors from European universities will participate in the study and provide feedback on the AVATAR, providing unique operational perspectives and requirements.

“The Romanian Border Police have been invaluable by providing access to their facilities, officers and cadets. We appreciate their willingness and foresight in allowing us to test the passport security of the future at their airport,” says BORDERS Executive Director, Dr. Elyse Golob.

To date, the AVATAR has been tested at the US-Mexico border and in several simulation exercises, some of which were carried out in cooperation with Frontex. This is the first field test that has been carried out in a European operational environment.

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About the National Center for Border Security and Immigration (BORDERS)

BORDERS is a consortium of 18 premier institutions, headquartered at the University of Arizona, dedicated to the development of innovative technologies, proficient processes, and effective policies that will help protect our Nation’s borders, foster international trade, and enhance long-term understanding of immigration determinants and dynamics. As a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Center of Excellence, BORDERS is funded through the Office of University Programs, Science and Technology directorate of DHS.

For more information, visit the BORDERS website at <http://www.borders.arizona.edu>.

About The University of Arizona (UA)

The University of Arizona is the leading public research university in the American Southwest. Its mission is to discover, educate, serve and inspire. The UA produces more than \$530 million in annual research and is the state's only member of the prestigious Association of American Universities. Its world-class faculty creates discoveries that improve the human condition and fuel the state's economy, and its research enterprise provides students with opportunities that can be found in few universities in the world.

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