



**Address by the Secretary General of the
International Civil Aviation Organization,
Dr. Taïeb Chérif,
to the AFI RAN Meeting**

(Durban, South Africa, 24 November 2008)

I would like to welcome all of you to this very special AFI RAN meeting. I would also like to thank the Government of South Africa for its generosity in providing the facilities and technical support to make this a successful event.

Traditional RAN meetings are essentially designed to review and upgrade regional air navigation plans. This one is markedly different. Here in Durban, we are invited to focus our energies on how best to improve the overall safety and efficiency of the African air transport system.

There is a lot at stake. A safe and efficient air transport system is a powerful driver of economic and social development. It makes it possible to tap the vast potential of global markets and to stimulate regional, national and local economies. Conversely, an underperforming system, one that is not safe or efficient, is an impediment to growth.

So we need to make a frank and realistic assessment of the state of aviation in Africa and we need to come up with equally realistic and practical solutions. Let us use this AFI-RAN to strengthen region-wide commitment to improving safety and efficiency, resolving deficiencies and addressing critical issues. And let this meeting be a platform for cooperation for decision-makers from States services providers and airspace users to realise a common vision of safer and more efficient skies.

It is my hope that when we leave here, we will have produced a set of work programmes and performance objectives, with measurable outcomes and metrics, that will direct the work of the Region for the next 7 to 10 years. Our proposals must be linked to the combined ICAO Global Aviation Safety Plan and the industry Global Aviation Safety Roadmap, and they must contain timelines and responsibilities, based on the methodology of the ICAO Business Plan. This will facilitate effective regional and global management, the obtaining of technical and financial assistance, and provide a comprehensive and documented set of needs and requirements for the AFI Region.

So what is the scope of our challenge? Under ICAO's Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme, audits were conducted in 35 African States as of 31 October 2008. Of those, 25 African States were referred to the Audit Results Review Board for safety reasons. 19 of these States still have unresolved issues stemming from their safety audits. And of the six States identified on the Safety Oversight Audit website as having significant safety concerns, five are from Africa.

Overall, African States exhibit more than 50% lack of effective implementation relative to seven of the eight critical elements of a safety oversight system. The most significant deficiencies are in the qualification and training of technical staff and in the resolution of safety concerns. Other specific areas of concern are staffing and recruitment procedures, financial resources, training policy and programmes, implementation of the training programme, resolution of safety issues, and incident and accident investigation.

When one considers these findings as a whole, one might feel overwhelmed. There is, however, every reason to be optimistic, if we do the right things and do them quickly and systematically.

Over the past few years, I have attended a number of regional and continent-wide aviation events in Africa and have met government and industry officials at the highest levels. I know that the political will exists to transform their air transport systems. There is a belief that things can change and there is a commitment to work to that end. That is by far the best reason to be confident.

Another reason is the latest medium-term traffic forecast from ICAO. The current financial crises and volatility of fuel prices make it difficult to make projections. Still, the latest statistics call for Africa to post the highest growth rate of any region by 2010, with an 8.5 % increase in Passenger Kilometres Performed. Long term, African airlines are expected to grow faster than the world average. Whatever the numbers turn out to be, the trend is pointing in the right direction and the more Africa can improve its air transport system, the better will be the results.

Still another reason for optimism is the growing list of success stories on the continent. One example is the launch of Reduced Vertical Separation Minima on 25 September. Since then, there has been no reported incident arising from its implementation. Credit goes to ASECNA and its Member States, the AFI Regional Monitoring Agency, IATA, the ATNS of South Africa and all AFI States. The productive Red Carpet Routes linking South and North Africa were also the fruit of close cooperation among ASECNA, IATA, and States concerned. And finally, the Hajj flight operations which have gone without any problem, thanks to close coordination and collaboration amongst States and service providers.

These achievements are tangible proof that change is possible and they have set the stage for many more. This AFI RAN meeting is about creating the context for them to happen.

In the area of safety, we will be looking for a continent-wide commitment on the establishment of Regional Safety Oversight Organizations. Very few States currently generate enough income from aviation to be self sustaining in this area and Regional Organization offers the most economically efficient way to pool resources towards effective oversight capabilities. The same principle applies to Regional Accident Investigation Offices and Regional Aviation Safety Teams.

We will also be looking at how the Comprehensive Regional Implementation Plan for Aviation Safety in Africa is progressing. Certain activities have already been undertaken under the AFI Plan and I am confident that it will become the basis for fundamental and systemic change throughout Africa in the years to come.

We will tackle some of the major impending challenges like the shortage of skilled aviation personnel worldwide, where Africa is losing many talented staff to other parts of the world. At the same time, there is the opportunity to train personnel and make them available to other parts of the world where demand is growing faster.

And we will consider many safety-related initiatives such as the Continuous Monitoring Approach now being conceptualized for strengthening the USOAP and its successor when the present cycle comes to an end in 2010.

In the area of efficiency, the list of technical and operational implementation issues to delve into is vast, so we will tackle the most urgent ones, those that can generate the greatest safety, efficiency and environmental benefits. These include Performance Based Navigation, continued central monitoring of the recent RVSM implementation, certification of aerodromes, implementation of quality management systems for MET data, modernization of VSAT, pandemic preparedness and establishment of search and rescue joint rescue coordination centres.

On the topic of efficiency of air navigation services, I might suggest that we keep in mind the outcome of the very successful Conference on the Economics of Airports and Air Navigation Services, or CEANS, held at ICAO in September. The recommendations made at the Conference were adopted

by the Council of ICAO on 14 November. They are designed to enhance cooperation in the air transport industry and increase the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of air navigation services. Subjects covered include economic oversight by States, requirements for the implementation of performance management systems, and the establishment of a clearly defined, regular consultation process.

The recommendations include other points related to efficiency such as more flexibility for commercialized air navigation services providers in setting charges, support for separation of States' regulatory responsibility from service provision, the application of good governance through best practices and the efficient and cost-effective implementation of the global Air Traffic Management (ATM) concept.

Regulatory issues are obviously part and parcel of the solution. There is a strong positive correlation between the level of effective implementation of the critical elements of a safety oversight system and the nature and status of civil aviation administrations. Accordingly, one of the major considerations in the reorganization and restructuring of civil aviation administrations is to grant them financial, administrative and operational autonomy to act in the interest of safety.

Where air navigation services are operated by autonomous entities, their financial situation and managerial efficiency have generally improved. That is why ICAO policy recommends that States consider the establishment of such autonomous entities when it is in the best interest of providers and users. Autonomy is also crucial in generating investments in air transportation infrastructure, one of the perennial roadblocks to progress for many countries.

Finally, together with the development of air transport infrastructure, economic liberalization is one of the key engines for the development of African States. The liberalization of air transport services in Africa has been progressing at various levels and would benefit from a more harmonized implantation on the continent. Progress needs to be made and ICAO stands ready to facilitate the process.

Ladies and gentlemen, as you can see, we have a huge task in front of us for the next six days. As we begin our work, rest assured that ICAO is more committed than ever in supporting Africa in the development of a comprehensive strategy aimed at substantially increasing the safety and efficiency of air transport across the continent. The current plans to reinforce our two Regional Offices and others around the world is testimonial to this renewed commitment. It is in the best interest of all members of the world aviation community that African States finally take their rightful place in the global marketplace.

I thank you for your attention and I wish all of us a very productive meeting.

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