Good morning ladies and gentlemen. Let me begin by expressing my deep appreciation to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for kindly inviting me to open this Fifth Meeting of North American, Central American and Caribbean Directors of Civil Aviation.

ICAO has been very appreciative of the recent progress which has been made by the States of your Region, not to mention the good work of Loretta and her team in driving and facilitating much of the required coordination, and it is a great pleasure for me to be able to recognize some of your work today, in addition to reviewing a number of our more pressing and certainly shared policy considerations going forward.

Our greatest challenges on a sector-wide basis over the coming decades virtually all derive from how aviation will need to evolve in order to manage the doubling of capacity now being projected through 2030. All of our current goals, whether tactical or strategic, political or economic, will be magnified significantly by this expansion – as will the implications of the actions we take to address near- and longer-term connectivity challenges in terms of:

- Increased airspace congestion and the risk to the safety and efficiency of air transport operations in general;
- The need to balance stringent security measures with facilitation; and
- Growing environmental pressures relating to greenhouse gas emissions, local air quality and noise around airports.

There is the need for massive investments in ground infrastructure and air navigation systems to cope with the coming doubling of passengers and aircraft movements. Then there is the potential, even dramatic shortage of pilots, mechanics and air traffic controllers, as well as the equivalent requirement to accelerate training and certification for these aviation professionals. Furthermore, the expected rapid evolution in new technological advancements and their application across all air transport domains will remain a dynamic challenge for regulators and operators in the years to come.

It was very much in response to these considerations that the 38th Session of the ICAO Assembly, in September 2013, adopted the current Vision and Mission Statements and the five Strategic Objectives of the Organization. These Objectives are to enhance global civil aviation Safety, improve and align Security and Facilitation solutions, increase system Capacity and Efficiency, foster the Economic Development of a sound and financially viable global civil aviation system, and optimize our many efforts supporting Environmental Protection.
In the area of Safety, the foremost priority of the Organization remains the reduction of the rate and number of accidents globally. In order to achieve the required safety performance objectives, our focus will be on the implementation of the ICAO Global Aviation Safety Plan (GASP), and the continuation of the Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme (USOAP) under the Continuous Monitoring Approach (CMA), as well as improved collaboration in the collection, analysis, sharing and protection of pertinent safety information.

In the area of Air Navigation Capacity and Efficiency, the implementation of the ICAO Global Air Navigation Plan (GANP) and its Aviation System Block Upgrade, or ASBU strategy, will help to propel and coordinate the needed modernization of the global air navigation system. The consensus-based performance objectives and timelines which characterize the ICAO ASBU approach will ensure the safe and effective management of future air traffic growth, even as its innovative technologies and procedures permit us to realize significant environmental benefits.

I would like to stress that ICAO is very much encouraged that the Port of Spain Declaration you will sign here today affirms your commitment to our Strategic Objectives and aligns your specific regional objectives and tactical work programmes to the GASP and the GANP. This is being further supported by the related review and approval of version 3.0 of the NACC’s Regional Performance-based Air Navigation Implementation Plan.

In this context, I would also draw your attention to the fact that, in the interest of improved transparency and accountability on these important strategic goals, ICAO will now be publishing not only an annual Safety Report against our global progress, but also an annual Air Navigation Report. ICAO will also launch new online regional reporting tools, what we refer to as ‘Regional Dashboards’, which will henceforth provide real-time updates against several priority Safety and Air Navigation metrics.

In the joint area of ICAO’s Security and Facilitation work, priorities here include enhancing aviation security measures, and in particular cargo security, through the promotion of risk-based strategies, as well as the evolution of the ICAO travel document and traveller identity programmes. Our aim here is also to ensure an optimized balance between our security and facilitation targets – so as to maximize connectivity and end-user convenience.

I am pleased that the Diplomatic Conference held earlier this month adopted a Protocol to amend the 1963 Tokyo Convention on offences committed on board aircraft. The new Protocol will help to stem the troubling frequency of incidents involving disruptive and unruly passengers. It expands jurisdiction over related offences to the State of the Operator and the State of Landing, and it will also serve to enhance global aviation security provisions by expressly extending legal recognition and protections to in-flight security officers (IFSOs). I wish to therefore encourage all States in the Region to ratify this very important air law instrument.

ICAO’s priorities with respect to the Economic Development of Air Transport will center on facilitating the removal of impediments to the progressive liberalization of air transport, in particular, of market access, ownership and control and air cargo, as well as the development of core principles for the protection of consumer rights.

ICAO will also look to updating necessary guidance materials on the impact of taxation and charges on air transport, on the funding and financing of aviation infrastructure in aid of the ASBU implementation, and on the funding coordination required to ensure effective safety and security oversight systems.
Concerning the environment, ICAO’s activities supporting the development of noise, particulate matter and aircraft CO₂ emission Standards, as well as the basket of measures which includes improvements in aircraft technology, operational efficiency, and the use of alternative fuels, will continue to progress.

An ICAO Council Environment Advisory Group (EAG) has been working on the development of a global MBM scheme under the direction of the Council. The EAG’s iterative or ‘strawman’ approach helps to ensure the full engagement of States and other stakeholders and the widest possible range of inputs. ICAO will also be conducting a series of Global Aviation Dialogues (GLADs) in every region during 2014-2015, and in this context we are hoping these will provide practical feedback to be considered by the High-level Conference on climate change we are planning for in early 2016. Work is also continuing on the development of mechanisms to facilitate States’ access to technical and financial assistance for their aviation-related emission reduction efforts, including the provision of assistance in the implementation of their States’ Action Plans.

I am pleased that, since the last NACC/DCA/4 Meeting, held in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, in 2011, the North American and Caribbean Region has been making excellent headway on a number of its priority initiatives. Your Pan-American Regional Aviation Safety Group (RASG-PA) has consistently delivered effective regional safety coordination and results since its inception in 2008 and continues to serve as a model for global best practices.

Similarly, the work of the ICAO/LACAC Aviation Security and Facilitation Regional Group (AVSEC/FAL/RG) is progressing as it continues to develop helpful assistance projects in coordination with your Region’s States and airports. It is also noteworthy that ICAO Technical Cooperation projects are currently ongoing in more than half of your Caribbean States.

While ICAO is therefore very much encouraged by these initiatives, I would strongly stress our shared priority to continuously ensure effective implementation of ICAO’s Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs), plans and programmes, in a globally-harmonized manner. This work is essential if we are to effectively address the emerging disparities amongst ICAO Member States in their capacity to implement new requirements.

Ladies and gentlemen, as of 7 December this year, ICAO will have been serving the global aviation community for 70 years as the leading forum where governments and industry meet to identify and address our common challenges and strategic concerns.

Incidentally, some of those challenges will relate to how we respond as a community to the tragic loss of Malaysian Airlines Flight 370. ICAO and IATA are now working together to ensure that ICAO’s Multi-disciplinary Meeting regarding Global Tracking, to be held at our Montréal Headquarters in just two weeks’ time, as well as IATA’s subsequent Task Force work over the duration of 2014, will proceed on a properly coordinated basis, in line with any adjustments to our work programme which may be required.

I am very confident of our success in these efforts if we continue to work together. Cooperation has made our global aviation network what it is today and it remains our most valuable asset in everything we do.

Let me please conclude now by wishing you fruitful and productive discussions on the very pertinent topics which have been set before you.

Thank you.