Good morning everyone. It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to this ICAO-WHO CAPSCA Global Symposium.

Although the CAPSCA programme has been very active in all ICAO regions, this is the first of its events to be held here at ICAO Headquarters. I am particularly pleased that the Symposium has been arranged in collaboration with the World Health Organization, a UN specialized agency with whom ICAO works very successfully, and to the mutual benefit of the separate communities we serve.

This level of inter-sectoral collaboration is essential for managing health risks that can potentially be transmitted by air transport, something which was clearly demonstrated by the Ebola outbreak that began last year.

ICAO was pleased to collaborate with WHO in responding to the Ebola emergency, and a number of joint initiatives were instigated as a result. These included an ICAO-WHO letter to Ministers of Health and Ministers responsible for Civil Aviation; the establishment of a joint Ebola Travel and Transport Task Force which ICAO coordinated and chaired; and the development of a two-year joint Aviation Action Plan for Ebola.

Funded by the UN/Ebola multi-partner trust fund, this common Action Plan has led to joint training events in West Africa, as well as assistance visits to States and international airports.

This type of support is very much in line with the No Country Left Behind initiative which I have made an organization-wide priority in ICAO, and we are therefore grateful that assistance and capacity-building are high on your agenda.

While we can all acknowledge that ICAO and WHO have worked well to harmonize their activities at the global level, more effort is needed at the regional, national and operational levels. Both of our Organizations have recognized that a more formal arrangement between us would be of benefit to public health event management in the aviation sector, and I am therefore very encouraged that your meeting will be addressing how this might best be realized.

Today’s Ebola outbreak is just one of a number of public health events that have involved aviation during the last 12 years, including the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, or SARS outbreak, in 2003 and the H1N1 Influenza pandemic in 2009.
Aviation can be involved in these types of emergencies in two major ways: first, it can be the mode by which disease is spread; and second, the aviation industry and the companies which support it can be severely impacted by flight restrictions or other health-related operational decisions. This can have significant consequences for States and their economies.

The Fukushima nuclear power plant accident in 2011 is also noteworthy in that it established that public health events, even those which are not related to communicable diseases, can still raise concerns which are critical to the safety of international flight operations.

This highlights how multidisciplinary our work truly is, and consequently an important aspect of all CAPSCA events is that they provide an opportunity for dialogue which cuts across varying areas of responsibility and expertise. This process subsequently contributes to the development of networks and mutual trust – two crucial foundations to have in place, especially during the early stages of a potential public emergency.

It is only by working closely with public health authorities in this manner, and on the basis of comprehensive preparedness planning, that civil aviation authorities can help alleviate associated risks for both travellers and businesses. The wider involvement of airline and airport operators is also important to these efforts, and ICAO therefore works closely on health emergencies with our colleagues from the International Air Transport Association (IATA) and Airports Council International (ACI).

Each of these global organizations has developed specific public health event guidance applicable to their memberships.

Before closing today ladies and gentlemen, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, especially in respect of its support for the CAPSCA approach since 2006. This U.S. institution also played an important role along with many other aid agencies and States in supporting the efforts of affected States during the Ebola outbreak. Thanks to everyone’s work, we are now seeing a noticeable decline in the number of new cases.

In addition, and following a recommendation from the recent ICAO High-level Safety Conference this past February, the ICAO Council will soon be considering possibilities for more sustainable funding for CAPSCA. At present, CAPSCA still relies on voluntary financial contributions which are too contingent on how visible a given health event may be, and I know many agree that this work is too important for that situation to persist.

On that note, let me please reiterate that we are very pleased to be able to host this CAPSCA Global Symposium here at ICAO Headquarters, and I will certainly look forward to reviewing your outcomes in the weeks ahead.

Thank you.