Opening address by the President of the Council of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), Dr. Olumuyiwa Benard Aliu, to the 25th Plenary Session of the African Civil Aviation Commission (AFCAC)

(Cairo, Egypt, 8 December 2015)

It is a pleasure and a great honour for me to address this 25th Plenary Session of the African Civil Aviation Commission (AFCAC), here in the very distinctive and historic setting of Cairo, Egypt.

I wish to express my sincere thanks to AFCAC for its kind invitation, and express my heartfelt appreciation to the Government of Egypt for the warm hospitality and courtesies it has so generously afforded all of us in hosting this important continental event.

In Africa today, civil aviation supports almost seven million jobs and generates 80 billion dollars in Gross Domestic Product. And especially for the continent’s rather prevalent Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS), enhanced air transport connectivity and competitiveness realizes an essential lifeline to regional and global markets.

This foundation for global connectivity is essential to the fostering of economic growth, especially with respect to enhanced travel and tourism and other vital trade activities. But we must also be clear that these benefits can only be fully realized through dedicated long-term commitments to modernized air transport infrastructure and effective civil aviation administrative oversight, not to mention other essential civil aviation capacities such as training provision and the associated availability of skilled air transport personnel.

To help encourage this level of progress and commitment, in September 2010 ICAO signed two Memoranda of Cooperation, one with AFCAC and the other with the African Union Commission. These agreements have served to strengthen our relationships and establish closer cooperation between us in the fields of aviation safety, aviation security, environmental protection and the sustainable economic development of air transport – important and fundamental requirements on the path to establishing reliable air services in line with global targets.

To better support sustainable air transport economic development on a global basis, in June of this year the ICAO Council adopted a long term vision for international air transport liberalization and core principles on consumer protection.

In Africa specifically, these policy advances complement the concrete steps taken by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union (AU), namely to progress the implementation of the AU Agenda 2063 and its Flagship Project for a Single African Air Transport Market by 2017 as well as the Common African Civil Aviation Policy. These actions are also fully supportive of the Yamoussoukro Decision’s implementation.

However there are many challenges still ahead of us in this regard.
Today for instance, more than 4,000 air services agreements globally dictate the rules and practices for air travel between States. And bilateral agreements are still the primary tools at our disposal for the exchange of traffic rights. Unfortunately, many of these agreements formalize restrictions which can impede the orderly planning and growth of airlines, airport operators and air navigation service providers.

To help address these persistent concerns, two important declarations were recently adopted by African States under the aegis of ICAO, namely: the Lomé Declaration of August 2014 on air cargo development in Africa; and more recently the Antananarivo Declaration of March of this year on Sustainable Development of Air Transport in Africa.

I strongly recommend that these declarations, which cover a range of urgent priorities relating not only to economic matters but also to aviation safety, security, training, and matters such as adherence to the Cape Town and Montréal Conventions, be duly referenced as African States continue to review their commitments and modernize their policy frameworks for civil aviation.

ICAO will also be pleased to collaborate closely with AFCAC on the regional forum it is organizing, similar to our successful ICAO Air Services Negotiation Event, and aimed at helping to foster greater liberalization in African skies.

Another critical challenge to safe and efficient Africa-wide civil aviation development is air navigation and airport capacity. Required infrastructure in some areas has not kept pace with the rapid increase in aircraft movements and passenger volumes, not to mention anticipating the projected doubling of traffic worldwide over the next 20 years.

In this regard, ICAO and AFCAC have been working hand-in-hand to promote the implementation by African States of Performance-based Navigation (PBN) as part of ICAO’s Aviation System Block Upgrades (ASBUs) and Global Air Navigation Plan (GANP) prescribing operational performance improvements through 2028. And as I mentioned in February of this year, during a meeting with African participants to the Second ICAO High-level Safety Conference, African air navigation service providers (ANSPs) should continue to work together to establish a regional framework supporting strategic improvements to the quality, safety and efficiency of the air navigation services available in African airspace.

I am very pleased that this process is now underway, and hope that it can quickly be realized.

Looking more specifically at Aviation Safety, ICAO’s most fundamental and guiding Strategic Objective, ICAO and AFCAC have continued to assist States in implementing the Abuja Safety Targets, and have developed a monitoring and follow-up mechanism through a performance dashboard. We are continuing to support continent-wide safety improvements under ICAO’s Comprehensive Regional Implementation Plan for Aviation Safety in Africa, or AFI Plan, which for a number of years now has been achieving important progress, especially towards the establishment of sustainable safety oversight capacities in African States.

The complementary AFCAC Cooperative Inspectorate Scheme (AFI-CIS) Assistance Missions are also being conducted with ICAO Regional Office support, with the objective of addressing significant safety deficiencies and improving overall effective implementation of ICAO Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs).
In the area of Aviation Security and Facilitation, ICAO established a special initiative known as the AFI SECFAL Plan in May of this year to support regional efforts aimed at mitigating risks and threats related to terrorism and drug and human trafficking. Its aim is to support the establishment of authorities and programmes with sufficient resources to ensure implementation of aviation security and facilitation SARPs and other requirements in all States.

The AFI SECFAL Plan Steering Committee will be directly supported by AFCAC’s Regional Aviation Security and Facilitation Group (RASFG), and I would note in this respect the meeting of African Ministers responsible for aviation security and facilitation matters which is presently being planned jointly by ICAO, the African Union Commission, and AFCAC, in order to establish regional high level implementation deliverables, targets and timelines.

While on the topic of security, I would also like to remind you that ICAO Member States were requested to remove from circulation all non-Machine Readable Passports as of 24 November this year. States which were not in a position to meet that standard should please seek assistance from ICAO, as compliance to this requirement is mandatory due to related security issues raised under UN Security Council Resolutions 1373 and 1624.

With regards to training and capacity building, you are aware that ICAO, in collaboration with AFCAC, has established the Human Resources Development Fund (HRDF) programme. I wish to urge all African States to contribute to this initiative, and to take advantage of its internships and training programmes.

In the area of Environmental Protection, efforts are being undertaken to reduce aviation’s contribution to climate change by encouraging States to develop CO₂ emission reduction Action Plans, and ICAO is also urging governments to sensitize their industries to this initiative, as well as requesting air transport service providers to put in place Environmental Management Systems (EMS) and to register their environmental policies with their local civil aviation authority.

By the end of this week, the important UNFCCC conference in Paris – COP21 – is expected to conclude its work and reach a new climate change agreement. ICAO is looking forward to a positive outcome from Paris, and one which will encourage our Member States to make further progress at our 39th Assembly next September, notably with respect to the global market-based measure for international aviation requested by the last Assembly in 2013.

Many of the challenges Africa faces today are tied to shortfalls in funding and coordination, especially regarding the technical, managerial and financial resources required to ensure effective implementation of ICAO SARPs by African States. Many of you are already aware of what we have undertaken to provide States with the assistance and capacity building they require to address these gaps, under our No Country Left Behind initiative, and I only wish to reconfirm here ICAO’s strong commitment to these priorities.

We also concluded our inaugural World Aviation Forum just two weeks ago, an event where we were happy to host many African Ministers and senior officials. The Forum was designed to further support No Country Left Behind by forging closer and results-based partnerships between developing States, the donor community, in addition to global and regional development agencies, and I am happy to report its unmitigated success in doing so.

ICAO will now be looking to build on these successes and the new partnerships they lead to, by conducting future Forums on an annual basis to review the results and best practices which emerge from this important and newly-enhanced cooperation.
Ladies and gentlemen, in closing now, let me please stress to you all the importance of the work we are now doing under No Country Left Behind in ICAO, and our need for commitment and partnership with States to successfully realize its objectives. Pursuant to the adoption of the new UN Sustainable Development Goals earlier this year, States now have an opportunity to leverage new partnerships and development funding earmarked for SDG realization, and to use it for the benefit of their air transport infrastructure and capacity building.

ICAO is here to help you develop the business cases demonstrating how air transport is such an important foundation and catalyst for increased economic growth and prosperity, to bring you together with the partners you will need for funding and support, and to help ensure your projects are designed and realized on a cost-effective and accountable basis.

I encourage all States present here to join us on this new and exciting journey, and on that note may I wish you all very engaging and successful discussions over the coming days.