Good Morning Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to join you today as we address the important new topic of unmanned aviation and the changes it is bringing to the African continent.

Aviation is undergoing a fundamental change in light of the widespread introduction of unmanned aircraft. Until recently, these aircraft operated on the periphery of the aerospace system. That is no longer the case. We are now seeing new types of aircraft, new types of operations and new locations for these operations.

Moreover, in Africa and throughout the world, we are already seeing new businesses and humanitarian operations leveraging these technologies and the opportunities they offer. This is occurring in ways that we had not envisioned even just a decade ago, and this evolution and innovation will doubtless continue as more and more people allow their imaginations to take off, literally and figuratively.

The flipside of this dynamic growth in opportunity is the challenge of balancing safety and security with efficiency and sustainability. This is particularly the case with regards to the existing manned aviation environment. The onus of succeeding in this challenge obviously falls on the shoulders of regulators, who must work to craft and establish a well-structured and appropriate regulatory framework. Many States and organizations, are contributing to this process, and ICAO’s mission to ensure global harmonization of the various solutions set out is now more important than ever.

During our 39th Assembly last October, the subject of unmanned aviation was raised numerous times, particularly in the Technical Commission. At issue were the increasing challenges States were facing in developing drone regulations and the increasing reports of close encounters between commercial air transport aircraft and drones.

As a result, the Assembly requested that ICAO expand its scope of work to provide a baseline of provisions to ensure global harmonization for all types of unmanned aircraft and their operations, including domestic.

Although this will take ICAO well into the unusual arena of domestic operations, however, in engaging this work we will help to facilitate earlier implementation of regulations for drones by States, common baselines for manufacturers to build to and for operators large and small to duly comply with.

In this regard, if you consider a company like Amazon, for instance, which presently is envisaging a global drone fleet to enhance its deliveries, the value of having a potential myriad of domestic regulations aligned via globally harmonized international standards becomes clearly apparent.
A key challenge we are facing is that these unmanned aircraft are designed, developed and used for hundreds of deeply diverse applications such as recreational videotaping, humanitarian support, wildlife monitoring and cargo delivery. Not to mention new personal taxi drones or unmanned aircraft systems, or ‘UAS’, designed for the provision of Internet bandwidth in remote communities.

Then there is the challenge of the number of these aircraft. Literally thousands are being sold daily at present. And again, they are deeply diverse in their characteristics and features and many are being sold to individuals who are unfamiliar with how to operate them safely and responsibly in an aviation environment.

Prior to initiating this expanded work programme, ICAO had to develop a new methodology that would provide the agility necessary to respond to such a rapidly evolving industry. Standards which take three to five years to develop and another two years to adopt cannot meet that demand in the timeframe which is both expected and required in order to assure continued safe and efficient operations.

Thus ICAO is implementing a more responsive Request for Information process focused on specific problem statements relating to low-altitude unmanned aircraft systems operations. States, industry, academia and other stakeholders were asked to submit proposals as of 15 July to a specific problem statement related to unmanned aircraft systems traffic management, or ‘UTM’, a term you will become very familiar with over the next year or two.

The Unmanned Aircraft Systems Advisory Group (UAS-AG), comprised of experts from around the world, has been brought together to review the proposals, assess their validity, and select ones to be presented at DroneEnable, ICAO’s unmanned aircraft systems Industry Symposium, which will be held from 22 to 23 September at our headquarters in Montréal.

It is further worth noting that this new drone activity is just part of ICAO’s work. We also are well on the way to building the regulatory framework that will facilitate international operations conducted in accordance with instrument flight rules. This work programme, when complete, will provide the basis for a certificated remotely-piloted aircraft (RPA) to operate in sequence with manned aircraft, employing the same procedures and separation standards. The focus here is on the highly capable part of the unmanned aircraft systems family operating from airports, and interacting as they do with air traffic control and other pilots in a transparent, seamless manner.

This work entails hundreds of new Standards and Recommended Practices to be adopted in our Annexes. The first large package of proposed standards and recommended practices for the remote pilot licence and related procedures on training have been circulated to States and international organizations for comment by 4 August of this year.

Like most Standards and Recommended Practices pertaining to remotely-piloted aircraft systems (RPAS), these provisions on licensing and training will put new burdens on States, and ICAO is fully cognizant of the challenge this will present to regulators needing to implement the requirements. Training of Licensing Authority personnel will certainly be essential.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

African States, like States in other regions, are facing increasing pressure to open the door widely for unmanned aircraft. But while their socio-economic benefits seem clear, we must avoid the tendency to rush headlong into unmanned aircraft systems operational frameworks which have not benefitted from all due diligence and the careful regard required for existing airspace users.
During this Symposium, we will be hearing about many of these new operations directly from the individuals who are actually conducting them. We will also hear from regulators who are addressing the regulatory challenges that they pose, and we will hear from air navigation service providers and others who are tasked with actually operating within these frameworks.

Each of these speakers will contribute to our understanding of the challenges being faced particularly in Africa, and we will be better equipped to determine the way forward, what actions are needed, and who needs to take action.

We also need to bring equal attention to the development of a coherent regulatory framework in which all stakeholders understand their roles and responsibilities for ensuring safe operations — whether manned or unmanned.

The outcomes of this event, will contribute knowledge and understanding to the members of the ICAO Council, its Air Navigation Commission, its Remotely-piloted Aircraft Systems Panel, and to the ICAO Secretariat. The better informed they are on the current activities and the associated challenges being faced by States and stakeholders, the more effective they will be in drafting, reviewing or adopting ICAO Standards and Recommended Practices.

I further wish to emphasize that attention must also be focused on ensuring suitable human resources capacities and capabilities to meet the growing demand in this domain.

In this regard I wish to recall that ICAO has established the Human Resources Development Fund (HRDF) in collaboration with the African Civil Aviation Commission (AFCAC).

A secondment programme has been established under the Human Resources Development Fund mechanism for African civil aviation officers. Ten of such personnel are currently seconded to ICAO. Plans are also underway to establish a professional development programme for young professionals to assist African States in attracting young women and men to the aviation sector and meet emerging needs, including unmanned aviation.

Finally this symposium provides ICAO, its Member States, and Partner Organizations, with another excellent opportunity to advance aviation priorities in the African region, consistent with our No Country Left Behind (NCLB) initiative, to help ensure that ICAO Standards and Recommended Practices implementation is better harmonized globally so that all States have access to the significant socio-economic benefits of safe and reliable air transport.

By being here with us at this symposium, you are helping the continent to embrace a very exciting and innovative area of civil aviation activity. Unmanned aviation is a challenging new frontier for us, but one which also holds tremendous promise.

I wish to take this opportunity to express ICAO’s deepest thanks to the Government of Nigeria for partnering with ICAO in hosting this symposium, and for the tremendous support and excellent facilities which have been provided. They are highly appreciated. In closing today let me please wish you all very engaging and productive discussions on this challenging and dynamic topic, and I will look forward to reviewing your results in due course.

Thank you.

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