Opening address by the President of the Council of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO),
Mr. Roberto Kobeh González,
to the 50th Conference of Directors General of Civil Aviation Asia and Pacific Regions

(Bangkok, Thailand – 1 to 4 July 2013)

“Innovations and Targets for Increased Safety, Enhanced Security and Sustainability of Asia Pacific Aviation”

It is an honour and a privilege for me to join you today for the 50th annual Conference of Directors General of Civil Aviation of the Asia and Pacific Regions.

I wish to express my deep gratitude to the Royal Government of Thailand for hosting this milestone Conference. Thailand has always been extremely gracious in providing accommodations and facilities for meetings of key aviation representatives from ICAO Member States. It is a gesture we truly appreciate.

By any measure, the evolution of air transport in this part of the world has been astounding. Over the past decade, the exceptionally rapid growth of many Asian economies has led to a significant expansion in the number of people who can afford to travel at home and abroad. At the same time, international tourism to and from Asia has helped maintain your region as the largest air transport market in the world and the one with the greatest potential for growth.

The resulting pressure on aviation systems is constant and unprecedented. Wisely, you have taken bold and innovative actions that are producing a new strategic, operating and regulatory environment, one that is adapted to your particular circumstances and that promises to accelerate traffic growth even more.

Above all, you are demonstrating in a pragmatic and persuasive fashion the power of innovation in reshaping your industry into a challenging and continually evolving marketplace.

One result has been an exponential growth in traffic, often in airspace that is already heavily congested. Together, we must implement measures to effectively and safely increase airspace capacity throughout the Region.

That is the rationale behind an ICAO Council decision to establish an APAC Regional Sub-Office, which we inaugurated just a few days ago in Beijing. It responds to the need for increased resources dedicated specifically to air traffic management and capacity-building. It will complement the ongoing activities and higher-level regional coordination of the Asia and Pacific Regional Office in Bangkok.
ICAO is extremely grateful to its Member States and China for their generous support and assistance during the planning and development stages of this new ATM facility, as well as for the secondment of expert personnel. Our three primary objectives will be to:

- Improve the safety and efficiency of Asia/Pacific flight operations through innovative procedures;
- Enhance airspace capacity and efficiency to accommodate APAC aviation growth; and
- Optimize ATM operations via the collaborative management of traffic flow.

We intend to realize these objectives through a dedicated Flight Procedures Programme Unit, an Airspace Optimization and Management Unit and an additional Unit focused on Air Traffic Flow Management and Collaborative Decision-Making initiatives and best practices.

As we move in that direction, we must forge ahead with initiatives in the other fundamentals of a sound air traffic system – overall safety of operations, security, and environmental protection. Over the past year or so, ICAO has made considerable progress in each of these areas.

The latest edition of the Global Air Navigation Plan, which includes the innovative Block Upgrades concept, emphasizes that our work in both safety and air navigation is more performance-driven than ever. It establishes clear targets and measures progress to ensure that our programmes and solutions are as focused, affordable and relevant as possible.

ICAO’s new Safety Report, the development of our online Regional performance ‘dashboards’, and the new Annex 19 on Safety Management are other examples of how innovation and targets are being integrated into our global aviation navigation and safety plans.

The same can be said of aviation security. We are constantly upgrading our procedures, expertise and intelligence networks to better anticipate and mitigate threats to air transport equipment and facilities. One of our goals is to reduce the costly burden on airline operations at airports and to improve the overall travel experience of passengers. The High-level Conference on Aviation Security last September put forth proactive strategies and actions based on international cooperation and improved information-sharing between States, air transport and law enforcement agencies. There was agreement on establishing processes for identifying and handling high-risk air cargo and on a blueprint for monitoring State compliance with security provisions through ICAO security audits.

As for the environment, significant advances were made in four key areas, namely global aspirational goals, States’ action plans, sustainable alternative fuels and market-based measures. One highlight was the establishment of a new metric system that will prove fundamental to developing the first-ever CO₂ emissions standard for aircraft, currently projected for 2015. Another is the engagement of States in preparation of their action plans to identify where reductions on emissions from international aviation can be achieved. Of course, the spotlight was on market-based measures and our efforts to present progress to the 38th Session of the Assembly. The ICAO Council and the Secretariat are working diligently on this complex issue and I look forward to submitting a proposal that will lead to constructive discussions at the Assembly in the fall. We are also looking forward to a new consolidated resolution on international aviation and climate change that will set out the work of the Council for the next three years.

Overall, I am happy with the forward-thinking approach we have applied to our work programme at ICAO. But, as I told the World Civil Aviation Chief Executives Forum in Singapore last February, much more is required to promote the long-term sustainability of air transport.

That is why the Council last year modified its vision and mission statement to underscore the importance of achieving a sustainable, global air transport network. We also created a distinct new Strategic Objective for the realization of a sound and economically viable air transport system.
By sustainable, we mean safe, secure, and efficient air transport operations that provide airlines and airports with a reasonable expectation of profitability – while supporting competitive economies and promoting balanced regional development. It also means better returns on investment, more funding for equipment and financing for infrastructure, better passenger service and a greater ability for air transport to deal with major setbacks. Greater overall efficiency can also mean a greater contribution to the global Gross Domestic Product and a more environmentally friendly aviation industry.

At ICAO’s Sixth Worldwide Air Transport Conference last March, participants adopted recommendations that should in fact lead to innovative approaches in how aviation changes the way it does business over the coming years. They address such policy issues as modernizing current restrictions on air carrier ownership and control, facilitating improved market access, harmonizing the patchwork of consumer protection regimes that are currently confusing for States, operators and passengers alike, and finally, taxation and fees.

On this particular point, the way a number of States in this Region apply taxes and fees to air transport activity can actually be considered a model. They recognize that low-tax, low-fee civil aviation frameworks can produce more substantial and sustainable economic benefits, such as higher employment and broader, more resilient tax bases. This can bolster local economies without unduly penalizing air transport or hindering its ability to provide economic and social benefits over the long-term.

This is but one of countless examples that show how the Asia/Pacific Region is fertile ground for innovation. As I said at the beginning, the progress you have made to date is simply astounding. It is based on widespread cooperation, political will and a commitment by all to change.

May this 50th anniversary DGCA Conference set the stage for another half century of innovation, progress and success for the benefit of the citizens of your Region and of the world.