



**Opening Remarks
by the Secretary General of the
International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO),
Dr. Fang Liu,
At the Arab Civil Aviation Commission's
23rd General Assembly (ACAC)**

(Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 18 May 2016)

Honourable Ministers,
Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Let me please begin by extending my deep thanks to the Government of Saudi Arabia and the Arab Civil Aviation Commission (ACAC), for the kind invitation to join you today for your 23rd Assembly.

I also wish to express ICAO's sincere appreciation to the General Authority of Civil Aviation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia under the leadership of His Excellency Mr. Sulaiman Al-Hamdan, the Minister of Transport, for the most generous and effective organization of this year's 23rd General Assembly of the Arab Civil Aviation Commission, which is graciously held under the High Patronage of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud.

This is my first official visit to Saudi Arabia and I am very grateful for the warm reception.

It will be my great pleasure this morning to bring into focus some of the key challenges and opportunities for aviation in the Middle East (MID) Region.

I would also like to highlight the progress that our closely knit organizations have jointly achieved in response to them.

The Middle East Region has taken great strides and shown solid leadership in recent years, for instance in the development of the new electronic Air Navigation Plan (eANP).¹

I would also like to highlight your very productive collaboration on the challenge of conflict zones, which you have effectively responded to by endorsing ICAO's MID Region ATM Contingency Plan.

This Plan is being implemented by all stakeholders in a very coordinated manner, through the activation of the Contingency Coordination Teams (CCTs).

In turn, this has enabled the re-routing of air traffic safely, and with the greatest possible efficiency, which serves to highlight not only the commitments and actions of Middle East States, but also the value of ICAO's role in fostering regional coordination.

¹ MID eANP Volume I was endorsed by MIDANPIRG/15 (8-11 June 2015) and is subject to approval by the ICAO Council

These points bring to mind the Memorandum of Cooperation signed by ICAO and ACAC in 2010, which strengthened our partnership and taken our cooperation to a higher level.

We have taken full advantage of the Memorandum over the past six years. It facilitates the exchange of statistical information and access to key databases. It is a shared tool for the organization of joint events, and for the promotion and support of training activities.

It has also helped us to very successfully transition to the new ICAO Flight Plan, and to eliminate duplication as we progress towards other common goals.

But as we now confront the challenges of sectoral growth, globally as well as in the MIDDLE EAST Region, we need to ask ourselves how this cooperation between ICAO and ACAC can drive even further progress on targets and needs for this region.

One objective which immediately comes to mind is the establishment of a Middle East/North Africa Regional Safety Oversight Organization, or R.S.O.O.

As some of you may be aware, ICAO is presently putting the final touches on a number of revisions to our Global Plans for Safety and Air Navigation, the GASP and the GANP.

These revisions will be reviewed and, we expect approved, by the ICAO Council, and later adopted by the 39th Assembly as the strategic direction for the technical work programme of ICAO in the fields of Safety and Air Navigation.

I mention this because a MIDDLE EAST RSOO would assist a number of MID States in meeting the targets established under the GASP, as well as associated Regional Aviation Safety Group (RASG) objectives.

Mainly these are focused around the development and effective implementation of State Safety Programmes, as well as the resolution of any outstanding safety oversight deficiencies identified by ICAO's USOAP audits.

If we cannot set in place an RSOO mechanism, these States will most likely not be able to develop the human and financial resources needed to correct their situations alone.

This would result in greater risks to local operations, which runs contrary to the steadily improving levels of progress and effective SARP implementation that ICAO has been recognizing here in recent years.

For instance the current average for Effective Implementation, or 'EI' of ICAO SARPs in the MIDDLE EAST Region is just over 68 per cent. And the ICAO target of minimum EI implementation is 60 per cent.

Of course I must make it clear that a number of MIDDLE EAST States have an EI rate over 90 per cent, which is truly exemplary.

But as we are talking averages, these very high individual EI scores point to the fact that there must be others which are significantly lower.

The R.S.O.O. strategy is designed to address these lower scores, and it was initially endorsed by the ACAC Executive Council in December 2012. It then received further support at the Second Meeting of Middle East Region DGCA's in May 2013. Progress had also been achieved at the Third Meeting last year. It is now expected that the next step would be the establishment of the Middle East and North African RSOO Steering Committee.

It is very important that this momentum be maintained, as safety management and oversight needs are still significant here, despite some encouraging recent improvements.

This brings to mind ICAO's *No Country Left Behind* initiative, which we have been reinforcing in every region of the world.

It shines a spotlight on how more effective SARP implementation leads to safer and more secure local air transport, which in turn fosters increased connectivity and greater prosperity for States.

MIDDLE EAST Region States are no exception to this dynamic, and safer and more secure air transport services still have a much more significant role to play in helping your States to eradicate poverty, fight inequality, and build peaceful, inclusive, and resilient societies.

These objectives are also directly consistent with the United Nations' *Agenda 2030* and its visionary Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs.

Aviation has a fundamental role to play in achieving many of these goals, and indeed 13 of the 17 SDGs are closely supported by ICAO's current Strategic Objectives.

This information is readily available for you to explore on our public website, but the point I wish to stress is that effective SARP implementation, ultimately, benefits much more than simply civil aviation governance.

It fosters employment, access to foreign markets and trade flows, and ultimately delivers critical socio-economic benefits and truly sustainable development.

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Going forward, ICAO will be looking for further action from MIDDLE EAST States consistent with the Doha Declaration, i.e. to develop and implement the action plan if necessary, the objective of which is to expedite the achievement of the region's main Aviation Safety and Air Navigation Targets.

Your Region has been a model for air transport growth, for both passenger and cargo traffic as well as fleet size, but as we have been stressing in ICAO for a number of years now, growth is best optimized when it is managed effectively.

This means that it must foster no negative impacts to the safety, security, efficiency or environmental performance of aircraft, airport or air navigation operations.

And it also points to the need for greater partnership and investment in air transport infrastructure and related emerging technologies, including for instance Performance-based Navigation (PBN) and Aeronautical Information Management (AIM).

I hope in this regard to see all of your States represented at ICAO's Second World Aviation Forum this year, the day before our 39th Assembly, where we specifically focus on fostering partnerships in aid of aviation development.

In the area of Aviation Security, we will look to even greater progress through programmes such as the Cooperative Aviation Security Programme–Middle East, or 'CASP-MID'.

It provides a coordinated approach to security assistance and training, tailored to the resources of States, and it has been heartening to see that it has set out such an ambitious work programme for the 2015-2016 period.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me stress that ICAO remains very encouraged by the level of MIDDLE EAST Region cooperation which has been established.

The strategies it has helped you to determine are fully consistent with our Global Plans, as are the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), metrics and targets which you have established to monitor and report on your progress.

ACAC's role remains vital for the support and implementation of these strategies, and consequently for the achievement of the performance targets.

And your current and future contributions to initiatives such as the MIDDLE EAST ATM Enhancement Programme (MAEP), the ATS Route Network Optimization Project, and the 2017 MIDDLE EAST Flight Procedure Programme, are greatly appreciated.

More generally speaking, I would suggest that ICAO-ACAC cooperation be extended, such that it also contributes to ICAO's Strategic Objectives for the economic development of air transport and environmental protection.

The recent Regional Coordination Meetings which have been held are a very positive step in this regard, and I have been especially encouraged by the wide-ranging partnership under this mechanism between ACAC and the Arab Air Carriers Organization (AACO), the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC), Airports Council International (ACI), the Civil Air Navigation Services Organization (CANSO), the International Air Transport Association (IATA) and of course ICAO.

This degree of comprehensive collaboration will surely bring great benefit to this work, and with ICAO's new Regional Director MID now in place, we are looking forward to further deepening our coordination with ACAC and its Member States.

In light of your Region's tremendous recent growth, and the projections for even greater expansion in flight and passenger volumes in the years ahead, the MIDDLE EAST Region should seek to become a global example of how air transport growth can be effectively managed.

This type of leadership would benefit not only your air transport sector, as I have mentioned, but indeed the future prosperity and long-term sustainability of your societies in general.

The ICAO-ACAC partnership has already proven itself to be a fruitful one, and I will look forward to reviewing our further progress and achievements as we continue to work together toward our common goals.

On that note I wish you all a very productive and thought-provoking 23rd Assembly.

Thank you.
