



**Opening Remarks
by the Secretary General
of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)
to the UN DESA - Ecuador High Level Meeting
and the DSPD/DESA Forum on Disability Inclusion
and Accessible Urban Development**

(Quito, Ecuador – 16 October 2016)

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen,

1. I wish to also express my thanks to our hosts from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), and Ecuador’s Ministry of Housing and Urban Development.
2. Persons with disabilities make up a significant percentage of the world’s population, and represent its largest minority. And their number is increasing.
3. The UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as well as the Annex 9 – *Facilitation* to the Convention on International Civil Aviation, called the Chicago Convention, and many other important documents have made it clear that Persons with disabilities should be accorded the same international rights as any other person, such as accessibility, full and effective participation and inclusion in society, freedom of movement, and freedom of choice.
4. These international rights apply to air travel as to all areas of life.
5. Aviation, like all other transport modes, needs to fully recognize and effectively accommodate this growing passenger segment.
6. There have been many changes in how we provide accessible facilities and services in our global network, and this trend requires renewed attention at the international level.
7. As highlighted in the United Nations Secretary-General’s High-Level Advisory Group on Sustainable Transport, “disability inclusion” requires supportive institutional, legal and regulatory frameworks.

8. ICAO already has International Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) related to facilitating transport for persons with disabilities, and these generally seek to ensure that airport facilities and services are adapted to their needs.
9. For example, States are strongly recommended to provide special assistance in a manner that respects the dignity of the individual.
10. They are also encouraged to cooperate suitably so that all elements of a journey are accessible to persons with disabilities.
11. These SARPs are supplemented by guidelines on services and features required to meet the needs of persons with disabilities during all stages of travel by air, in keeping with the general obligations of States under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
12. ICAO continues to promote not only accessible air transport, but also the removal of barriers to such access, in order to enable the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities in air transportation. In this regard, ICAO is pleased to contribute to the objectives of *UN Enable*.
13. The protection and improvement of airline passenger rights more generally, along with the continuing liberalization of air transport regulation, have gained greater regulatory importance globally.
14. A significant number of States have adopted related regulatory measures, and industry operators have committed to voluntary consumer protection agreements which include access for passengers with disabilities.
15. We are constantly seeking to improve our guidance at ICAO, and so we have been asking ourselves how these often varying consumer protection regimes can be better harmonized globally.
16. With a view to introducing convergence between them, ICAO has developed a set of high-level Core Principles on Consumer Protection.
17. These principles cover passengers with disabilities, stipulating that they should have convenient access to air transport and all appropriate assistance in a non-discriminatory manner.

18. They also encourage passengers with disabilities to provide pre-notification of their respective needs, and of course all access requirements must also conform to aviation's fundamental safety standards.
19. It is also important that consumer protection regimes strike an appropriate balance between the protection of consumers and maintaining a level playing field for industry competitiveness.
20. They must also take into account the needs States may have for flexibility in light of their varying social, political and economic characteristics.
21. Ladies and gentlemen, well-designed intermodal transport infrastructure supports the sustainable social, economic and environmental development of the world.
22. For "disability inclusion" and "accessible urban development", integrated transport system planning is absolutely critical.
23. ICAO is already working very closely with the UN and other international organizations on these priorities, for instance the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) on passenger transport concerns, and the World Customs Organization (WCO) for cargo services.
24. But we have also asked ourselves what more we can do, and the answer to that question involves how we integrate our sustainable aviation development efforts into a new approach: one which balances the needs of multiple transport modes and best-practice-based urban development.
25. In this regard, ICAO recently initiated a joint pilot project with UN-HABITAT to codify the synergies between well-planned and efficient airport facilities, and prosperous and sustainable urban centres.
26. ICAO's work programmes are also focusing more and more today on innovation and technology to enhance global connectivity and the three pillars of sustainability.
27. New technology will improve economic and operational efficiency of the civil aviation system. It is also promising with respect to enhancing the travel experience of passengers with disabilities.
28. The boom of e-commerce similarly presents an opportunity to improve the use of air cargo services for persons with disabilities.

29. This mainly refers to expanding e-commerce activities and their dependence on rapid door-to-door delivery, something which is also very much appreciated by persons with mobility challenges.
30. In closing here today, please let me reiterate that air transport is by far the world's safest and most efficient mode of mass transportation, and that the global connectivity it provides helps States and regions to achieve many sustainable socio-economic benefits.
31. Air transport has become an essential component of our global society, supporting some 63.5 million direct and indirect jobs globally, and generating more than 2.7 trillion dollars in total economic activity — roughly 3.5 per cent of global GDP.
32. It is essential that aviation sector keeps and improves its inclusiveness and accessibility, including for persons with disabilities along with urban development so that no one, and no country, is left behind.
33. Thank you.