



**Introductory address
by the Secretary General,
of the International Civil Aviation Organization,
Dr. Fang Liu,
to the Celebration of the 25th Anniversary
of the Founding of the Arab Civil Aviation Organization**

(Recorded virtual message, 8 February 2021)

Distinguished guests and colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

1. As we come together to appreciate this important milestone in Arab State cooperation in international civil aviation, please accept my warmest congratulations for everything which has been achieved among your States since this organization was first established in 1996.
2. Through the 2010 Memorandum we formalized together, the working relationship between the ICAO MID Office and the ACAO has been continuously improving, and we have been encouraged by the results of the capacity-building and other efforts you have embarked on together.
3. The joint efforts we've embarked on the seminars, workshops and training courses we've developed have led to improved SARP implementation in Arab States across all five of ICAO's Strategic Objectives, performance and results which have been clearly recorded through ICAO's oversight auditing programmes.
4. Similar successes have resulted from your joint activities supporting the implementation of the ICAO Global Plan Roadmaps for Safety and Air Navigation Capacity and Efficiency, the GASP and the GANP, and through the coordination and targets established under MID Regional Plans, and projects such as the MENA RSOO, the AIG Regional Coordination Mechanism (ARCM), and MID Region Air Traffic Flow Management.

5. I would also like to appreciate here how active the ACAO has been within the framework of the MID Recovery Plan Task Force, where it cooperates even more closely with ICAO, the Arab Air Carriers Organization (AACO), and IATA, and where Arab countries are contributing important information and best practices while aligning international response efforts through ICAO's COVID-19 monitoring platforms.
6. As the President alluded to earlier, these are very challenging times for air transport, and especially for international passenger movements.
7. In the Middle East region alone, international connectivity has been reduced by 116 million passengers, which translates into 21 billion in lost operator revenues during 2020.
8. Domestic declines added another 23 million passengers to this total, and a further two billion dollars in operator losses.
9. The precipitous decline in air traffic being seen has placed a severe liquidity strain on the aviation industry, threatening the financial viability of many companies globally, as well as millions of businesses and careers all over the world.
10. Not only airlines and airports, but also manufacturers, ground handling and catering companies, and virtually every supplier in the air transport value chain is being impacted.
11. When skies are as dark as they are now for air transport, it can be difficult to remember that they will clear again, and that when they are the world will quickly be re-connected by international flights.
12. And let us also not forget that before COVID-19 struck, Arab countries in the Middle Eastern Region were well underway to completely reshaping global long-haul markets, and managing the world's fastest growing passenger and cargo traffic for almost ten years running.
13. I don't think that it's too soon to look forward to what we can achieve together once the pandemic begins to subside, or to appreciate the clear onus upon us to enable the tremendous advances in aircraft and propulsion types now being innovated so that they can be placed at the service of passengers and businesses much sooner than later.

14. Innovation and solidarity will be key to our sector's recovery, including in terms of building back better in its aftermath to assure a greener, more sustainable air transport sector for future generations.
15. They will also be instrumental in addressing our most pressing pandemic priorities today, whether for practical and cost-effective digital health certifications, or efficient and reliable global vaccine distribution.
16. ICAO and organizations such as the ACAO will have a very important role in meeting these challenges today, and in defining air transport's more sustainable future.
17. Before I conclude, I would like to emphasize ICAO's deep appreciation for the financial contributions we've received from various Arab countries in support of the fulfilment of ICAO's critical pandemic coordination role, the MID Region NCLB Strategy, and also other global initiatives and projects including our new iPacks.
18. On behalf of our Secretariat I am honoured today to congratulate you on your first 25 years of accomplishments, and to wish you similar successes in the very exciting years to come.
19. Thank you.