



**Address by the Secretary General
of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO),**

Dr. Fang Liu

to the

International Women's Day High-level Dialogue

(Virtual event, 8 March 2021, 1000 hours EST)

1. It gives me great pleasure to be with you here today in celebration of the International Women's Day.
2. Each year the 8th of March provides us with an opportunity to deepen our understanding of the role women play in being a driving force of development, not only with respect to economic growth, but also through the social, political and cultural contributions women make to their communities and societies, and to the world at large.
3. This year's observance, however, falls at a time when our world is facing a multi-layered public health and socio-economic crisis.
4. This has exacerbated inequalities, exposed serious vulnerabilities, and is impacting global economic progress as countries continue to respond and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.
5. Against this backdrop, the UN chose to focus International Women's Day (IWD) this year on "Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world".
6. In doing so, the UN also anchors today's celebration in the global commitments reflected in some important international frameworks, namely the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, the *Beijing Declaration*, and the *Platform for Action*.

7. In 2015, when Agenda 2030 was adopted through the United Nations, leaders envisaged a world of equal opportunity permitting the full realization of human potential and contributing to shared prosperity.
8. In fact, while SDG 5 on gender equality and empowerment of women is just one of 17 Sustainable Development Goals, the overall commitment to gender equality is prominent, comprehensive and cross-cutting throughout all of the SDGs, ensuring sustainable development is inclusive and gender-responsive.
9. Despite this recognition and universal consensus on the crucial importance of gender equality, as well as the remarkable progress on women's rights and leadership in the past decades, gender inequalities remain persistent in our societies and within various sectors, with gains being far from consistent.
10. International air transport is unfortunately no exception to this situation.
11. Our sector, while highly technical, holds enormous potential for advancing the agenda for gender equality and women empowerment.
12. Prior to the pandemic, it had a historical track record of doubling the number of passengers and flights it managed every fifteen years.
13. It connected people and businesses, stirred innovation and the advancement of new technologies, and created jobs and prosperity fostering sustainable social and economic development worldwide.
14. Notwithstanding the pandemic and its very dire impacts on current operations, as well as these socio-economic development aspirations, we should not lose of the fact that people everywhere have come to expect their world to be accessible and connected, and that as medical circumstances permit a return to normal they will take to the skies again in the not too distant future.
15. It's no secret to any of us here today that women's engagement in technical areas and their representation in leadership positions in aviation remain significantly underrepresented.

16. This means we have much more work ahead of us to ensure sustainable and transformative progress, and the fact that there are so many of you attending this event today is evidence enough of a powerful endorsement of our shared cause.
17. ICAO attaches great importance to gender equality, and as the first female Secretary General of ICAO I have made it a personal and urgent priority during my two tenures.
18. I consider progress towards gender equality not only important with respect to the basic human rights of women, but also to ICAO's efficiency and credibility as a global multilateral organization.
19. Having spent an entire career in the service of international civil aviation, I have witnessed how more women in leadership and executive positions translates into more diverse perspectives at the table tackling our sector's challenges and bringing positive impact for social and economic growth.
20. As data provided by UN Women shows, some of the most efficient and exemplary civilian responses to the COVID-19 pandemic have been overseen by women leaders.
21. And global populations have a clear expectation today to see more equal representation among women and men in both public and private leadership roles.
22. Today, the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the aviation sector is being felt around the world, and the unfolding crisis continues to shed light on the challenges that women in aviation face as they have been disproportionately impacted.
23. This explains why now, more than ever, it is important to find ways of reimagining and rebuilding a world that serves everyone.
24. Long before the COVID-19 pandemic struck, the need for continuous skilling and re-skilling in the workforce was widely recognized.
25. As a technically focused sector, and one heavily reliant on innovation, skills will also not merely need to be learned, but also continuously updated to keep pace with aviation innovations.

26. I am therefore pleased to announce that, to mark this year's International Women's Day, as well as the History Women Month, ICAO's Global Aviation Training programme is launching a new initiative to encourage more female participation in ICAO online courses. The initiative will include a 50% discount applying to prospective and current female aviation professionals for online courses developed by ICAO.
27. Another of the challenges in creating an enabling work environment for women has been the policies around work life balance.
28. As the world adapts more and more to flexible working arrangements, it's hoped that related expectations can be managed such that women will find more opportunities to meet their personal and family responsibilities.
29. It's important in this regard that companies and organizations remain fully aware of, and sensitive too, the significant challenges that primary caregivers face in balancing their professional and personal commitments.
30. Cultural barriers, gender bias, and gender stereotypes continue to hold women back from rising in technical and decision making roles.
31. To address these concerns we need cultural change, and bolder targets for equal representation, including new policies for gender quotas.
32. In this regard, I wish to applaud the ICAO Council who last Friday under the guidance of its President, adopted a declaration on improving gender representation in ICAO's governing and technical bodies. The Representative of India, Dr. Shefali Juneja, as the Chair of the Council Small Working group on Gender as well as some of its members present today may talk about this achievement during the panel discussions.
33. In concluding today I'd like to emphasize that change is not only about historical moments or highly regarded achievements.

34. It is upon every one of us to be advocates for gender equality within the spheres of our influence and reach, and to shape a more equal future for our sector through our everyday actions and beliefs.
35. Our discussions today can lead the way to greater commitment and action, and I want to assure you of ICAO's continued commitment to the important work ahead of us.
36. Thank you all for your tenacity and your enthusiasm, and I greatly look forward to today's inspiring discussions.