



**ADDRESS BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE  
INTERNATIONAL CIVIL AVIATION ORGANIZATION (ICAO),  
DR. TAÏEB CHÉRIF,  
TO THE FIRST SESSION OF THE AFRICAN UNION CONFERENCE  
OF MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE FOR TRANSPORT**

(Algiers, 21-25 April 2008)

It is an honour for me to take part in this particularly important meeting of African Ministers Responsible for Transport, as it culminates a series of ministerial conferences on transport which began in Sun City, South Africa, in May 2005.

As I recall, a major objective in Sun City was to review the overall situation of air transport in Africa and recommend specific measures for accelerating the full implementation of the Yamoussoukro Decision – still one of the most pressing issues for African aviation.

There is no doubt that African aviation is at the crossroads of progress. The fundamental challenge is as follows: while air transport in Africa holds tremendous potential for growth and economic development, by fostering trade and foreign investments, it remains relatively small compared to those of other continents. At the same time, rightly or wrongly, Africa's aviation is perceived to be unsafe and inefficient, which in turn inhibits growth.

Part of the solution lies in the progressive, systematic and harmonized liberalization of the air transport sector throughout Africa. This is a complex question that as Ministers of Transport, you will certainly address this week. For my part, I would like to focus this morning on a bold initiative that has the potential of dramatically improving aviation safety in Africa and how it is perceived, namely, the Comprehensive Regional Implementation Plan for Aviation Safety in Africa, also known as the AFI Plan.

Over a year ago, the Air Navigation Commission of ICAO recommended a revitalization of the Organization's presence in Africa, in the form of a cooperative effort by all stakeholders to significantly reduce the accident rate and increase the overall level of safety. This is in line with a conclusion of the Libreville meeting that the accident rate in Africa be brought down to world levels by 2008.

The AFI Plan was approved by Council of ICAO and subsequently endorsed at a high-level meeting of African States in Montreal last September, on the eve of the 36th Session of the ICAO Assembly. The intent of that meeting was to obtain firm political commitment from African States to implement the Plan and to generate tangible expressions of support from States, industry and other major stakeholders.

The ICAO Assembly itself passed a Resolution fully supporting the Plan, while calling for voluntary contributions to assist in the process. The Resolution further highlighted the need to better coordinate assistance programmes in the Region and acknowledged the often-stated willingness of the international community to help in resolving specific safety problems.

This actually goes to the root of the problem. There have been many well-intentioned efforts over the years, but they were too often uncoordinated and perhaps insufficient or inappropriate for the task at hand. The AFI Plan addresses these shortcomings essentially by adopting the strategy and methodology contained in ICAO's performance-based Global Aviation Safety Plan and the industry's Global Aviation Safety Roadmap developed in cooperation with ICAO. Both documents were fully integrated to concentrate on activities with the highest return for improving safety. The result is a disciplined, programme management approach that permeates every aspect of the AFI Plan. It stresses clearly defined objectives, outputs, activities and metrics. Accountability is the overall consideration at every stage.

Also inherent to the AFI Plan is greater coordination of ICAO safety-related programmes and projects with those of national and regional bodies in Africa, as well as international organizations concerned. I wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank those who participated in the formulation of the Plan and who have committed to its realization.

So where do we stand with implementing the AFI Plan?

Late last year, the ICAO Council made available the required funds for the first phase of the project and we immediately created the AFI Comprehensive Implementation Programme, or ACIP. We then established a highly representative ACIP Steering Committee composed of nine States, including five from Africa, the African Union, the African Civil Aviation Commission, the African Development Bank, the European Commission, the Industry Safety Strategy Group and the World Bank. The Committee held its first meeting in February and the second one is planned for October.

The ACIP will focus on three broad areas: enable States to establish and maintain a sustainable safety oversight system; assist them in resolving deficiencies identified through safety oversight activities; and enhance the safety culture of the entire air transport system.

These goals are ambitious and they can be achieved – through cooperation.

- States and Regional Organizations must commit to cooperate with the AFI Comprehensive Implementation Programme
- Existing regional cooperation must be strengthened through Regional Safety Oversight Organizations
- Industry and donors must cooperate in the implementation of priority projects
- Projects must address identified priorities and
- ICAO must integrate the capabilities and resources available at Headquarters and Regional Offices, Contracting States and industry partners.

As I have said many times before, ICAO is ready and willing to do its share. Through our Regional Offices in Africa and now the ACIP, we are looking at how we can best contribute to the exercise, yet we need a strong signal from other stakeholders that they are likewise on board.

An avenue for substantial progress is the upcoming Regional Air Navigation – or RAN – meeting which will take place from 24 to 29 November. RAN meetings are normally attended by high-level State representatives, ICAO Council Members and members of the Air Navigation Commission. They stimulate discussion at political and technical levels and involve a wide range of air transport service providers and users.

The Government of South Africa has graciously offered to host the next RAN meeting and on behalf of ICAO, I wish to thank South African authorities for their generosity.

The gathering is planned as a checkpoint in the implementation of the AFI Plan and a timely opportunity to address critical aviation safety issues, strengthen region-wide commitment to resolve deficiencies, and develop a comprehensive work programme for the implementation of air navigation facilities and services. It will also serve as the basis for the planning of safety and air navigation provisions for the next ten years, hence the importance of your presence there. As participants, you will be called upon to agree and commit to decisions taken that will shape the future direction of aviation safety and efficiency in Africa.

The political will to move forward is certainly growing. I believe there is a more widespread understanding of the need to invest in air transport, to stimulate the economy, to get Africans to fly in Africa and to attract more business and tourism from other continents. For countries where funding is a major challenge, such investments could be made by pooling human and financial resources through regional and sub-regional organizations, or through a concerted effort on the part of various departments within a country to channel the required funds to aviation.

This was recognized by the Committee of Experts of the First Joint Meeting of the African Union Conference of Ministers of Economy and Finance and the Economic Commission for Africa Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, held in Addis Ababa in late March. In its report, the Committee highlighted aviation safety as one of the challenges of the 21st century in Africa and underscored the need to involve not only Ministers responsible for transport, but also those of Finance and Economic Development. To that end, it recommended that the ECA assist African Countries in improving their transportation systems, including air transport safety and services; and that in addition to Ministers responsible for Transport; Ministers of Finance and Economic Planning should also be involved in transport development on the continent.

Ladies and gentlemen, you hold in your hands the key to the future growth and prosperity of civil aviation in your respective countries, regions and throughout the continent. The time has come for us to all join forces in solidifying and expanding African air transport, for the benefit of all Africans and the world community. We can best do this by working together.

I wish you success in your collective endeavour, and assure you that ICAO will be there every step of the way.

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