



**ADDRESS BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE
INTERNATIONAL CIVIL AVIATION ORGANIZATION (ICAO),
DR. TAÏEB CHÉRIF,
TO THE ELEVENTH SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE
ARAB CIVIL AVIATION COMMISSION (ACAC)**

(Tripoli, Libya, 12-13 May 2008)

I would like to thank the Arab Civil Aviation Commission for their kind invitation to attend this 11th Session of its General Assembly. I would also like to acknowledge the Civil Aviation Authority of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya for its ongoing support of the ICAO Regional Office for the Middle East and for its hospitality throughout this meeting.

The current membership of ACAC consists of 16 States and covers a vast territory stretching from Morocco to Oman and from Syria to Yemen. The development and growth of the air transport industry varies sometimes considerably from one State to the next. Accordingly, challenges differ widely as do the resources available to meet them.

Where there is strong growth, the focus is often on airport capacity and the availability of qualified personnel such as pilots, controllers, maintenance and management. Where the industry is in a more developmental stage, emphasis has to be placed establishing such requirements as proper aviation legislation, a strong regulatory framework and other institutional components.

In all cases, issues are complex and must be addressed in a cooperative manner. Promoting such a collaborative approach is the *raison d'être* of ACAC. It is not an easy task but certainly an essential one, as was highlighted last month during a Symposium on regional aviation organizations co-hosted by ICAO and the European Commission in Montreal. The outcome of that event may provide practical food for thought for this audience during the Assembly.

The objective of the Symposium was to discuss the experiences of regional civil aviation bodies, their contributions to international civil aviation, and how to strengthen their relationship with ICAO. The 168 participants from 48 States and 38 organizations concluded that regional organisations are a positive reality, that they are a great contributor to the safe and orderly development of international civil aviation, and that there is a clear trend towards increased regional governance.

Participants also agreed that the wider international aviation community benefits from the development of common rules within regional organisations and from the greater harmonisation of standards and regulations they achieve. Moreover, regional organizations make it possible to pool resources and reduce costs, particularly safety oversight systems, air navigation services, security and environmental policies and programmes.

Regional organizations can also ensure greater coordination when States decide to embark on a process of liberalisation at the regional level. As we know, liberalization rests on the converging of rules, or even the development of common rules, and preferably the creation of a regional regulatory framework. In this respect, regional integration can be a means to develop a more flexible approach to

the issue of ownership and control, a factor hampering the development of civil aviation on a global scale.

So there should be no question as to the value of a strong and vibrant ACAC, one that demonstrates the political will to thrive and exercise effective change, that includes all Arab States and that forms a truly integrated and representative body. ACAC has everything to gain from doing so, not only for itself but for its relations with neighbouring States and the rest of the world.

Not only could a strong ACAC energize the development of civil aviation throughout its membership, it could also bring much needed support to initiatives in Africa, which in turn would benefit ACAC Members.

One of them is the *Comprehensive Regional Implementation Plan for Aviation Safety in Africa*, or AFI Plan. The objective of the Plan is for sustained improvements in aviation safety in Africa. It was developed by ICAO in cooperation with African civil aviation authorities and the air transport industry. It represents the most coordinated and inclusive effort ever to deal with the very serious safety challenges facing the majority of African States. The value of the Plan was recognized by Saudi Arabia which pledged 250,000 US dollars to the initiative, because safer skies in Africa means enhanced safety for all flying to, from and within the continent.

Another major opportunity for ACAC to increase its involvement is at a Special AFI Regional Air Navigation Meeting which will take place from 24 to 29 November. RAN meetings are normally attended by high-level State representatives and members of the ICAO Council and Air Navigation Commission. 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 Government of South Africa has graciously offered to host the Special AFI RAN meeting and I invite ACAC to join us as we shape the future of aviation in Africa.

If ACAC is to play this developmental and coordinating role fully, it will need to adapt to a rapidly changing environment, as other regional organizations have done, and ICAO can provide the required assistance, in a spirit of cooperation and mutual support.

The formula has worked well for the past 50 years or so, beginning with the creation of the European Civil Aviation Conference in 1955. Later, ICAO supported the creation and subsequent operation of the African Civil Aviation Commission. On 1 January 2007, AFCAC became autonomous. It has grown in stature and has taken on a strategic role in the development of civil aviation throughout the continent. A defining responsibility makes it the executing agency for the Yamoussoukro Decision of 1999. Without the moral, financial and logistical support of ICAO, this would not have happened.

Much the same can be said of LACAC, the Latin American Civil Aviation Commission. ICAO helped establish and manage the Secretariat of the Commission as well as its strategic and political direction. Today, LACAC is also an autonomous organization that plays a crucial role in the evolution of aviation in all of the States of Latin America. It is well respected and shares its expertise and experience in various venues around the world. Again, without ICAO, this would not have happened.

Likewise, ACAC and ICAO can take together measures to ensure a close cooperation and coordination.

- It would also be beneficial for ACAC to attend ICAO meetings, such as the SAR & Civil/Military Coordination Seminar to be held in Cairo, on 26-27 May. This would certainly contribute to greater regional cooperation.

These are just a few examples of what we could initiate to foster a more efficient and effective relationship. I am sure there are many more and we could take advantage of this meeting to begin the process.

One last effort I would to highlight is a decision of the ICAO Council to review the reorganization of the regional programme. The overall objective is to enhance the delivery of services to all of our Member States and to the aviation community. In the process, we want to streamline further the integration of Regional Offices with Headquarters. The exercise should last about one year, with a report presented to the Council in May/June of next year. We look forward to your suggestions as to how we can better serve Members States, Regional Organizations and all stakeholders of the world aviation community.

Again, I thank you for your invitation to the 11th General Assembly of ACAC and I wish you all a most for productive meeting.

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