



**ADDRESS BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE  
INTERNATIONAL CIVIL AVIATION ORGANIZATION (ICAO),  
DR. TAÏEB CHÉRIF,  
TO THE OPENING SESSION OF THE  
38<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
OF THE AFRICAN AIRLINES ASSOCIATION**

**(Cairo, 6-7 November 2006)**

It is a distinct pleasure for me to address the 38<sup>th</sup> Annual General Assembly of the African Airlines Association (AFRAA), in Cairo. This city was the venue for the first AGM of your association in 1969 and in the intervening years, AFRAA has played a determinant role in the development of air transport in Africa. It has guided industry stakeholders to work together on various initiatives in the operational, commercial, technical and training fields and it has helped sensitize governments on ways and means of increasing the efficiency of the air transport system.

I am particularly encouraged by the collaborative role played by AFRAA in improving air services on the continent, with a view to facilitating the realization of the objectives of the African Union. In this regard, I applaud the recommendations of the High Level Meeting of Chief Executives of African Airlines, held in Tunis in May of this year, and AFRAA's active participation at that meeting.

I commend these achievements that today represent the platform from which to address even greater challenges that confront not only the African air transport industry but also the global air transport system, albeit in various degrees. Safety, security, protection of the environment and liberalization are areas which need special attention, particularly from your perspective on the participation of African airlines in the global marketplace.

We begin of course with safety because unfortunately the accident rate on the African continent is on an upward trend, despite tremendous efforts by many national authorities to improve the integrity of their civil aviation infrastructure. The fact that African authorities are committed to reducing the accident rate to the worldwide level by 2008 is a very positive sign, since tourism and trade with the rest of the world will not flourish as it should until aviation is safe and, perhaps more important, is acknowledged to be safe.

The ICAO Conference of Directors General of Civil Aviation held in March of this year opened the door to viable and effective solutions to the safety challenge in the form of transparency and sharing of safety-related information. In a landmark decision, the 153 DGCA's agreed to post results from the ICAO Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme on the Organization's public website as soon as possible, but at the latest in March of 2008. At present, more than 80 States have authorized ICAO to publish the information on audits carried out in their territory, including 17 in Africa. I believe this will encourage States to correct safety deficiencies that remain in their aviation systems and prompt other States and donors to provide more rapid and effective assistance in the form of much-needed financial or human resources. The fact that the target date is contemporaneous with Africa's commitment to reduce its accident rate to world levels by 2008 can be viewed as additional motivation to act quickly.

Transparency and sharing of information also underpins ICAO's *Unified Strategy to resolve safety-related deficiencies* adopted by the Organization's Assembly in 2004. It has particular significance for Article 21 of the Chicago Convention, which prescribes that each Contracting State should undertake to provide any other Contracting State or to ICAO, on demand, information regarding registration and ownership of registered aircraft. When this registration data is shared, it can provide a clearer picture of the status of any given aircraft. States can then make more informed decisions regarding operations by that aircraft within their airspace. When this verification cannot be made, States have the right to restrict admission. At the insistence of African States, the DGCA Conference Declaration did stipulate that restrictions on aircraft should be used exclusively for safety considerations and not for gaining economic advantage. Accordingly, ICAO agreed to develop a harmonized process and a uniform approach for the surveillance of foreign aircraft operations.

The Conference also emphasized the need for Safety Management Systems (SMS) that transcend the prescriptive aspect of compliance with ICAO standards with a proactive, performance-based process and the implementation of a safety culture throughout an aviation infrastructure. Overall, the Conference called on States to ensure the timely establishment of Civil Aviation Authorities that are adequately funded, competent, empowered and autonomous to the extent that they can act independently on safety issues. A proper regulatory framework and an effective oversight mechanism are key to systematically and consistently improve aviation safety.

Reliable air transport services are also essential to competing effectively in the global marketplace and creating investment and export opportunities that drive economic activity. This is critical for the African continent where almost one third of countries are landlocked, with no access to the ocean or seas, and where air transport infrastructure can be developed more efficiently than road or rail.

Unfortunately, a large number of airlines suffer from poor financial performances, low traffic volumes, high insurance costs and low productivity. There are serious concerns regarding air traffic navigation and airspace management, as well as problems associated with aging or near-obsolete aircraft and ground installations. And, as you know, it is increasingly difficult for African carriers to compete effectively in international air transport markets on the basis of bilateral arrangements and in the absence of a liberalized regime of traffic rights to facilitate the free movement of goods and persons. Finally, a growing number of donor governments and lending institutions are asking for a coordinated assistance effort in the air transport sector so that policy makers and the donor community can work within a common strategic framework of identified priorities and goals.

As I have indicated before in other fora this year, the time may have come to establish a strategic framework for the coordinated and streamlined development of Africa's aviation industry. This would include an in-depth review of national and regional air transport policies, and the need for investments to be made in new technologies, safety and security improvements, quieter and more-fuel efficient aircraft, infrastructure modernization and adaptation, and business simplification plans for carriers. Policy and strategy options to promote a common plan of action could be developed, while at the same time recognizing that Africa is a continent of diverse experiences and uneven development.

I would like to repeat to this audience the message I delivered on a number of occasions this year concerning seven major areas where action might be taken:

- The successful implementation of the Yamoussoukro Decision and definition of a common external air transport policy for Africa;
- The achievement of further progress on economic and airline marketing issues, including privatization of airlines and airports, the marginalization of African carriers in international airline mergers, and technological improvements to passengers services and procedures;, and radio frequency identification technology for baggage handling systems.
- Strengthening of the institutional framework to foster the healthy growth of air transport, promoting greater multilateral cooperation and establishing appropriate governmental infrastructures for safety and security oversight;
- Formulation of policies and infrastructure programmes that improve safety and facilitate growth, including investment in increased airport capacity and improvements, in addition to other initiatives I mentioned earlier;
- Development of appropriate systems and mechanisms to respond to security requirements;
- Reduction of emissions and noise pollution without adversely affecting air transport growth;
- Encouragement of sustainable development by using cost-recovery measures, taxes, and revenue-generating mechanisms to fund deteriorating infrastructure, equipment and services.

There is one more item which I would like to stress and that is training. Your association strongly believes that adequately trained and competent management are key to safe, secure and profitable operations throughout the aviation industry. We at ICAO share the same belief.

Based on global cooperation, the ICAO TRAINAIR programme aims at improving the safety and the efficiency of air transport, through the establishment and maintenance of high standards of training and competency of aviation personnel on a global basis. TRAINAIR assists and supports all States in sharing resources and expertise, so that all achieve a common threshold upon which to build a safer and more efficient global air transport system. Through TRAINAIR, we are all partners in addressing sometimes very difficult management, organizational and financial issues.

Ladies and gentlemen, achieving full maturity in the air transport field rests with African States and their airlines. The world aviation community is ready to work closely with African States and organizations to ensure a safe, secure, efficient and sustainable air transport system on the continent to the benefit of us all.

I thank you for your kind attention and I wish you a most productive Annual General Meeting.

